

Phenomenon of digital da'wah: Analysis of religious moderation and the ethics of da'wah communication on social media

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Abstract

Purpose – This study analysis the phenomenon of digital da'wah, focusing on religious moderation and the ethics of da'wah communication using a virtual ethnographic approach. Two controversial case studies are presented in this study: Gus Miftah and an iced tea seller, as well as da'wah in unconventional spaces (Bethel Indonesia Church and a nightclub).

Method – This study uses a qualitative, virtual ethnographic approach to analyse the phenomenon of digital da'wah on social media.

Result – The research findings show that, First, the implementation of religious moderation in digital da'wah requires a more careful approach in balancing freedom of expression with social responsibility. Second, Preachers need to develop digital competencies that include not only technical skills, but also an understanding of digital communication ethics and the social impact. Third, the role of social media algorithms in shaping public perception of da'wah messages is crucial.

Implication – This research contributes to the development of a framework for ethical and moderate digital da'wah.

Originality/Value – This study examines the phenomenon of digital da'wah in the era of social media with a focus on religious moderation (digital *wasathiyyah*) and ethics of da'wah communication.

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Kata kunci:

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Abstrak

Tujuan – Studi ini menganalisis fenomena da'wah digital, dengan fokus pada moderasi agama dan etika komunikasi da'wah menggunakan pendekatan etnografi virtual. Dua studi kasus yang kontroversial dipresentasikan dalam studi ini: Gus Miftah dan penjual teh es, serta da'wah di ruang-ruang tidak konvensional (Gereja Bethel Indonesia dan klub malam).

Metode – Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi virtual kualitatif untuk menganalisis fenomena da'wah digital di media sosial.

Hasil – Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, Pertama, implementasi moderasi agama dalam da'wah digital memerlukan pendekatan yang lebih hati-hati dalam menyeimbangkan kebebasan berekspresi dengan tanggung jawab sosial. Kedua, para da'wah perlu mengembangkan kompetensi digital yang mencakup tidak hanya keterampilan teknis, tetapi juga pemahaman tentang etika komunikasi digital dan dampaknya terhadap masyarakat. Ketiga, peran algoritma media sosial dalam membentuk persepsi publik terhadap pesan dakwah sangat krusial.

Implikasi – Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kerangka kerja untuk dakwah digital yang etis dan moderat.

Orisinalitas/Nilai – Studi ini mengkaji fenomena dakwah digital di era media sosial dengan fokus pada moderasi agama (digital *wasathiyah*) dan etika komunikasi dakwah.

Introduction

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the landscape of Islamic da'wah, presenting both new opportunities and challenges in disseminating religious messages. Social media, as the primary platform for digital communication, has now become the primary arena for da'wah activities, enabling broader reach while creating new complexities in maintaining the quality and ethics of da'wah message delivery (Ulfah, 2022). This digital da'wah phenomenon has not only changed the way messages are delivered but also influenced how audiences receive, understand, and respond to da'wah content disseminated through various digital platforms. The digital era has revolutionized the landscape of Islamic da'wah, bringing about a transformation that has transformed not only the medium of delivery but also the substance, methods, and impact of da'wah itself. This phenomenon has given rise to a fundamental paradox: on the one hand, digital technology offers extraordinary potential to spread Islamic messages worldwide with unprecedented reach. However, on the other hand, the freedom and speed of digital information have actually opened up space for the spread of da'wah content that does not align with the principle of religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*), a key characteristic of Islamic teachings (Zaman et al., 2023).

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The core problem facing Indonesia's digital da'wah today lies in the imbalance between the quantity and quality of da'wah content. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2023) shows that da'wah content on Indonesian social media has experienced an exponential increase of 340% in the past five years. However, a survey by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Research and Development Agency in 2023 revealed that 68% of respondents assessed that the quality of digital da'wah content has declined, with the main indicators being an increase in controversial, judgmental content that does not reflect Islamic values of tolerance (Golan & Stadler, 2024).

There are several crucial/critical current issues regarding religious moderation and the ethics of da'wah communication in Indonesia, including the following: *First*, the complex reality of religious moderation in Indonesia. This issue includes the challenges of true tolerance and its superficial implementation. Regarding true tolerance, the Indonesian Religious Harmony Index has decreased from 73.83 in 2019 to 67.46 in 2020, indicating a significant downward trend. From 2011 to May 2021, there were 91 cases of blasphemy and defamation, and the Setara Institute recorded 122 cases in 2022. Data from the Social Progress Imperative shows that Indonesia scored 2.38 and ranked 140th in terms of religious freedom, and scored 7.40 and ranked 122nd in the indicator of discrimination and violence against minorities (Bahri et al., 2025; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2024). Then regarding the superficial implementation, the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesian educational institutions still relies on a top-down approach that is limited to the textual realm, with three main factors: a top-down policy orientation, a classical nature in delivery, and a cognitive orientation that does not encourage direct tolerance practices (Chotimah et al., 2025; Faisal et al., 2022; Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024).

Second, the ethics of Islamic communication in the digital era. The issue of ethical Islamic communication has become crucial in Indonesia, particularly with the rapid use of social media, which has given rise to key challenges: the degradation of communication ethics on social media, resulting in hate speech and intolerance, low media literacy among Indonesian netizens, and the

spread of hoaxes and provocative religious content (Kawangung, 2019). Based on these challenges, the ethical principles required are that ethical communication of da'wah must be based on the principles of the Qur'an: *Qaulan Sadidan* (correct words), *Qaulan Balighan* (words that hit home), *Qaulan Maysuran* (easy words), *Qaulan Layyinan* (gentle words), *Qaulan Kariman* (noble words), and *Qaulan Ma'rufan* (appropriate words) (Istriyani & Widiana, 2016).

Third, the question arises: Is tolerance in Indonesia truly superior to that in other countries? The answer is not that simple, as a paradox exists between strong religious beliefs and low recognition of others' religious freedom (Setinawati et al., 2025). There are negative indicators, namely there were 424 acts of violation of religious freedom in 2020, an increase from 327 cases in 2019, the Indonesian Social Hostilities Index showed a score of 4.8 in 2019, which is included in the "High" category (3.6-7.1), 38% of respondents stated that they were disturbed if a house of worship of another religion was built near them, and 36% did not support leaders of different religions (Setinawati et al., 2025). Thus, a regional comparison emerges, indicating that Indonesia is not exceptionally tolerant for a newly developing democratic country, and its level of religious intolerance is not significantly different from that of countries with similar levels of economic development and democratization (Ali et al., 2021).

The core problem of contemporary digital Da'wah can be identified in three critical dimensions. *First*, the degradation of the quality of Da'wah messages due to the pressure to create viral content. Social media algorithms that prioritize engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) have encouraged preachers to produce sensational, controversial, or emotional content to gain maximum attention (Samsudin & Putri, 2023). This phenomenon contradicts the principle of *wasathiyyah*, which emphasizes balance, wisdom, and a non-extremist approach to conveying religious messages. *Second*, the loss of quality filters and religious authority in the digital da'wah ecosystem. The democratization of digital platforms has enabled anyone to da'wah without going through a process of validating competency or adequate qualifications (Aripudin & Junaedi, 2024). This situation creates chaos in religious discourse and has the potential to mislead people who lack sufficient religious literacy, thereby failing to distinguish between quality and low-quality da'wah content.

Third, societal polarization and fragmentation are caused by echo chambers created by social media algorithms. Research from the Pew Research Center (2021) shows that algorithms tend to display content that aligns with user preferences, creating a homogenous communication space and reducing exposure to diverse perspectives. In the context of da'wah, this situation can exacerbate sectarian polarization and hinder the role of da'wah as a unifying force in society (Mukhtar, 2022).

Developments in information and communication technology have opened up new opportunities for preachers to reach more diverse audiences across various geographic regions. However, the ease of access and speed of information dissemination on social media also pose their own risks, particularly related to the potential misuse of digital platforms to spread content inconsistent with the values of religious moderation (Slama, 2018). Viral phenomena on social media often become uncontrolled and can lead to misinterpretation of the Da'wah message. The concept of religious moderation, or *wasathiyyah*, in the digital context is increasingly relevant to study as a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of contemporary Da'wah. Digital *wasathiyyah* relates not only to the content of the Da'wah message but also encompasses the

delivery method, platform selection, timing, and consideration of the social impact of the disseminated content (Wawaysadhya et al., 2022). In the Indonesian context, religious moderation has become a national program promoted by the government as an effort to maintain social harmony and prevent religious radicalism.

The background to this research problem stems from concerns about the phenomenon of digital Da'wah, which often ignores the principles of religious moderation and communication ethics. The digital era has democratized the dissemination of Da'wah messages, allowing any individual to become a preacher and disseminate religious content without adequate filtering or verification (Achmad & Jannah, 2022). This condition increases the risk of spreading Da'wah content that is not in accordance with moderate Islamic values, and even has the potential to cause social conflict.

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The viral phenomenon on social media also creates pressure for preachers to create content that attracts attention and garners high engagement, often at the expense of the substance and quality of their messages. Social media algorithms that prioritize engagement and interaction can encourage preachers to create content that is both controversial and sensational in order to gain more attention (Samsudin & Putri, 2023). This situation can shift the focus of Da'wah from its primary goal of spreading good messages to one of popularity and virality. Furthermore, the lack of digital literacy among preachers and their audiences is also a significant problem. Many preachers lack a deep understanding of the dynamics of digital communication, including how social media algorithms work, the ethics of communicating on digital platforms, and the long-term impact of disseminated content (Nauval et al., 2024; Karim & Riyadi, 2024). Similarly, audiences for da'wah cannot often verify the quality and authenticity of the da'wah content they consume. Another issue focused on in this research is the loss of quality control in digital da'wah. In conventional da'wah, there are social and institutional control mechanisms that can help maintain the quality of da'wah messages. However, in the digital context, any individual can become a da'i without going through an adequate competency or qualification verification process (Hamdi et al., 2021). This condition can lead to the spread of inaccurate, even misleading, Da'wah messages.

Previous studies on digital da'wah have been conducted by various researchers with various focuses. The literature review reveals that research on digital da'wah has experienced rapid growth over the last decade; however, significant gaps remain that need to be addressed. *First*, Mark Ward's (2018) study examines the transformation of religious practices in the digital era by emphasizing changes in religious authority and the formation of virtual communities (Ward, 2018). *Second*, Campbell and Tsuria's (2021) study on digital religion demonstrates how digital technology not only alters the way religious practices are carried out but also influences the understanding and interpretation of religious teachings themselves. However, these studies focus more on the global context and have not specifically analyzed the phenomenon of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia using the framework of religious moderation (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

Third, research on digital da'wah in Indonesia reveals a significant transformation in the methods and strategies employed by da'i in their da'wah activities. They found that social media has become the main platform for spreading religious messages, but also poses challenges in maintaining the quality and authenticity of da'wah messages. This research makes an important contribution to understanding the landscape of digital da'wah in Indonesia; however, it has not yet thoroughly analyzed the aspect of religious moderation in the digital context (Sihabudin et al.,

2024). *Fourth*, research on religious moderation on social media provides an interesting perspective on how *wasathiyyah* values can be implemented in religious activities on digital platforms. This research highlights the importance of adopting a balanced approach in conveying religious messages on social media to prevent polarization and horizontal conflict. However, this research has not specifically analyzed controversial cases that can provide practical lessons for implementing religious moderation in digital da'wah (Saumantri, 2023). *Fifth*, research on da'wah communication in the digital era contributes to understanding the dynamics of contemporary da'wah communication using a classical communication theory approach. This study examines the effectiveness of various da'wah communication strategies on digital platforms. However, it has not integrated aspects of social media algorithms, which significantly influence the reach and impact of da'wah content (Andriani, 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in six fundamental aspects that distinguish it from previous research: *First*, an in-depth empirical analysis of two controversial viral cases (Gus Miftah vs. iced tea sellers and Da'wah in non-conventional spaces) that have never been studied academically comprehensively with a qualitative approach to Da'wah content analysis using a systematic evaluation framework based on indicators of religious moderation and communication ethics (Bibir, 2024; Inilah.com, 2024; Inilahcom, 2024; John, 2024; Kajian Rutin, 2021; Surya, 2024; Susanto, 2024).

Second, the integration of three theoretical frameworks (the 2019 Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' religious moderation, Lasswell's communication model, and social media algorithm theory) into a single holistic analytical model yields a new framework for moderate digital da'wah. *Third*, the study employs method triangulation, combining virtual ethnography, interviews with 15 key informants (digital preachers, communication experts, and religious figures), and algorithmic content analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. *Fourth*, the development of concrete indicators of religious moderation and ethical da'wah communication on social media that are operational and implementable, complementing the existing conceptual framework with empirical evidence, including URLs from TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter, as well as popular articles about the viral content of the Gus Miftah incident.

Fifth, this study specifically examines the role of social media algorithms in amplifying religious content, an aspect that has been largely absent from previous studies on digital da'wah. By analyzing how platform-specific algorithmic mechanisms influence the visibility and impact of religious messages, this study contributes to the understanding of the technological mediation of Islamic communication in a way that goes beyond traditional media studies approaches. *Sixth*, a comparative analysis of da'wah practices in non-conventional spaces, including places of worship belonging to other religions and entertainment venues, provides nuanced insights into the boundaries of acceptable da'wah methodologies in pluralistic societies. This dimension addresses the ongoing scholarly debate about the appropriate context and methods for Islamic proselytization in diverse social environments.

The indicators of religious moderation in this study refer to the framework of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) developed by Quraish Shihab (2019) on *wasathiyyah*, which includes four main pillars: *First*, National commitment (*al-muwathanah*), namely recognition of the nation-state system and commitment to the basic consensus of the nation. *Second*, tolerance

(*tasamuh*), namely the attitude of giving space and not interfering with the rights of others to believe and worship according to their religion. *Third*, Anti-violence (*la 'unf*), namely the rejection of all forms of violence in the name of religion. *Fourth*, Accommodation to local culture (*muwafaqah*), namely acceptance of local customs and traditions as long as they do not conflict with the basic principles of religion. Then, the indicators of ethics in da'wah communication utilize the Lasswell framework contextualized for digital media, including: *First*, the credibility of the communicator (*who*), which encompasses the scholarly capacity and moral integrity of the da'i. *Second*, Quality of the message (*says what*), which includes the depth of substance, accuracy of references, and relevance of context. *Third*, media appropriateness (*in terms of channel selection*) involves choosing a platform and format that suits the audience's characteristics. *Fourth*, audience understanding (*to whom*), identifying the needs and background of the message recipient. *Fifth*, impact effectiveness (*with what effect*), evaluating changes in audience attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (Kerim et al., 2025; Samsudin & Putri, 2023).

This study also employs a case study approach that analyzes two controversial cases involving the famous preacher Gus Miftah. The selection of this case is based on its viral impact on social media and the potential learning that can be gained for the development of more ethical and moderate digital Da'wah practices. *The first* case is the controversy of Gus Miftah versus a tea seller, which raised the issue of Da'wah ethics in the public spotlight (Inilah.com, 2024). *The second* case is the controversy surrounding Gus Miftah's Da'wah at the Bethel Church of Indonesia and at a nightclub, which sparked debate about the appropriate methods and venues for Da'wah. The viral phenomenon that has befallen various Indonesian preachers in the last three years is a concrete indicator of this crisis (Redaksi, 2024). Cases such as the controversy of Gus Miftah with a tea seller, Da'wah in places of worship of other religions, to various other incidents involving famous preachers, show that the problem does not lie in the intentions or religious competence of the preacher, but in the lack of understanding of the dynamics of digital communication and the implementation of the principle of religious moderation in the digital context.

Based on the background of the problem, this study aims to analyze the phenomenon of digital da'wah using the framework of religious moderation and communication ethics against a controversial case study: the controversy of Gus Miftah versus tea sellers and da'wah in non-conventional spaces (Bethel Church of Indonesia and nightclubs) using the theory of religious moderation, Harold Lasswell's da'wah communication theory, and algorithm studies theory. This study is expected to contribute to the development of a more ethical and moderate digital da'wah framework, as well as provide practical recommendations for da'i in optimizing the potential of digital media while maintaining the values of Islamic *wasathiyah*.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a virtual ethnography method, to analyze the phenomenon of digital da'wah on social media. Virtual ethnography was chosen as a methodological approach due to its ability to analyze cultural and communication practices that occur in digital spaces (Yusuf, 2017). The design of this study employs an instrumental case study approach, focusing on two controversial cases involving digital da'wah practices. The selection of the case study design is based on its ability to provide an in-depth analysis of complex phenomena

in a specific context. The instrumental case study was chosen because the cases analyzed serve as instruments to understand broader issues, namely the phenomenon of digital da'wah and the implementation of religious moderation in a digital context, based on the following criteria: *First*, High virality with a reach of more than 10 million views across platforms. *Second*, triggering intense public discussion about the ethics of da'wah. *Third*, involving the issue of religious moderation in both method and content aspects. *Fourth*, a Representative of the challenges of contemporary digital da'wah. *Fifth*, Availability of adequate digital data for in-depth analysis (Yin, 2018).

The data collection technique in this study employs digital content analysis of various data sources, including scientific articles indexed in the Scopus and Sinta databases, spanning the last five years (2019-2024). *Second*, Popular articles and online news discussing the cases studied. *Third*, Virtual Ethnography and Digital Content Analysis involve collecting data from various social media platforms (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and popular articles) using digital data collection techniques, including netnography, with limited participatory observation and systematic documentation (Kozinets, 2019; Murthy, 2008). Content analysis was conducted thematically using an inductive-deductive approach to identify narrative patterns, communication strategies, and public responses (Braun & Clarke, 2023). *Fourth*, Other digital documentation relevant to the phenomenon being studied. The data analysis technique uses thematic analysis with an inductive-deductive approach. Deductive analysis is carried out using an established theoretical framework, namely the theory of religious moderation (digital *wasathiyyah*), Harold Lasswell's theory of da'wah communication, and algorithm studies theory. Meanwhile, inductive analysis is carried out to identify themes that emerge from empirical data that cannot be explained by the existing theoretical framework (Lasswell, 1935). *Fifth*, in-depth interviews with key informants using semi-structured techniques with 15 informants based on competency and credibility criteria (Patton, 2015).

Additionally, the limitations of this study lie in the dynamic nature of digital data, which can change or be lost at any time. Some social media content may have been deleted or modified during the research process. To overcome this limitation, the researcher documented and backed up relevant data as soon as it was identified. Research ethics in this study were maintained by observing the principles of digital research ethics, including respect for the privacy of social media users and the use of public data in accordance with the provisions of each platform. The identities of individuals who are not relevant to the research analysis will be disguised or not explicitly stated to protect their privacy (Munasaroh, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Theory of Religious Moderation (Digital Wasathiyyah)

The concept of religious moderation, or *wasathiyyah*, in Islam has a strong theological foundation based on the Qur'an, specifically Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 143, which refers to Muslims as "*Ummatan Wasathan*" (the moderate/middle people). In the digital context, the concept of *wasathiyyah* has undergone significant evolution and adaptation to respond to the challenges of communication in the information technology era (Rofik & Misbah, 2021).

Quraish Shihab (2019) defines *wasathiyyah* as a balanced attitude that integrates material and spiritual aspects, individual and social, tradition and modernity, without falling into extremism. In the context of digital da'wah, digital *wasathiyyah* can be understood as the implementation of the principles of religious moderation in the practice of religious communication through digital technology platforms, encompassing aspects such as content, methods, target audiences, and the social impact of the messages disseminated (Shihab, 2019).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019) formulated five indicators of religious moderation that can be adapted in a digital context: *First*, Commitment to nationality (*digital citizenship*). *Second*, tolerance (*digital tolerance*). *Third*, Anti-digital violence. *Fourth*, Friendly to local culture (*cultural sensitivity*). *Fifth*, accommodating to tradition (*adaptive to digital culture*). These five indicators are the framework for evaluating the quality of digital da'wah content from the perspective of religious moderation (RI, 2019).

Harold Lasswell's Theory of Islamic Communication in a Digital Context

Harold Lasswell's communication model, with its formula "*Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect*," remains relevant to analyzing da'wah communication, although each element undergoes significant transformation in the digital context (Lasswell, 2018). *First*, the "*Who*" element (*Communicator*). This element in digital da'wah experiences a democratization of authority. If in traditional da'wah, the legitimacy of a da'i comes from formal religious institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, Islamic universities, or Islamic mass organizations, then in the digital context, authority can be built through follower counts, engagement rates, and viral content (Kuswana et al., 2023). This phenomenon creates a "*digital religious authority*" that does not always correlate with theological competence.

Second, the "*What*" (*Message*) Element. This element has undergone a format transformation from long lectures to micro-content, adjusted to the characteristics of each platform. Instagram Stories require interesting visual messages, TikTok demands creativity in a short duration, YouTube allows in-depth educational content, while Twitter is suitable for short statements and interactive discussions (Andriani, 2023). The challenge is to maintain the substance of the da'wah message in these various formats. *Third*, the "*Channel*" Element. This element is no longer limited to mosques, religious studies, or traditional mass media, but extends to various digital platforms with different algorithmic characteristics. Each platform has a specific communication language and influences how the message is received by the audience (Pangestu & Ulum, 2022).

Fourth, the "*To Whom*" Element (*Audience*). This element has experienced tremendous geographic and demographic expansion. Digital da'wah can reach a global audience with diverse cultural backgrounds, ages, educational levels, and levels of religiosity. This requires a more sophisticated and culturally sensitive communication approach (Lasswell, 1935). *Fifth*, the "*Effect*" Element (*Impact*). This element can be measured in real-time through various digital metrics, but measuring spiritual impact and behavioral change remains a challenge. Research shows that high engagement does not always correlate with effective da'wah in the context of character building and spirituality (Kuswana et al., 2023).

Algorithm Studies Theory in the Context of Digital Da'wah

JID | 322 Algorithm studies theory is an interdisciplinary field that examines the impact of algorithms on society, culture, and communication. In the context of digital da'wah, understanding algorithms is crucial because it determines the visibility, reach, and impact of da'wah content (Anwar & Mujib, 2022). The concept of “*algorithmic governance*” in Algorithm Studies Theory suggests that algorithms are not neutral but have inherent values, biases, and agendas that influence the type of content promoted or suppressed. Social media platforms tend to prioritize content that generates high engagement, often featuring controversial, emotional, or sensational material (Bunt, 2018). This creates tension with the principle of *wasathiyyah*, which emphasizes balance and wisdom.

The concept of “*Filter bubble*” and “*echo chamber*” in Algorithm Studies Theory refers to a phenomenon where algorithms display content that matches user preferences, creating a homogeneous communication space. In the context of da'wah, this can strengthen sectarian bias and reduce exposure to diverse perspectives (Setiyawati et al., 2019). The concept of “*Algorithmic amplification*” in Algorithm Studies Theory can provide an extraordinary boost to viral da'wah content, but it can also amplify problematic content. Research indicates that negative content tends to receive greater amplification because it triggers stronger emotional reactions (Hibrizi, 2024). Moreover, the concept of “*data colonialism*” in Algorithm Studies Theory is also relevant in the context of digital da'wah, where global platforms dominate local communication spaces and influence the way people interact with religious content. This raises questions about sovereignty in digital da'wah and the need for platforms that align more closely with local values (Munir et al., 2020).

Religious Moderation in Digital Da'wah: Implementation of Wasathiyyah in the Era of Social Media

The concept of religious moderation or *wasathiyyah* in the context of digital da'wah faces complex challenges that are different from conventional da'wah. Analysis of digital da'wah practices reveals that implementing values of *wasathiyyah* requires significant adaptation to the unique characteristics of digital media (Abdurrahman, 2020). Social media, as the main platform for digital da'wah, has features that can both support and hinder the implementation of religious moderation in delivering da'wah messages.

The characteristics of social media that support the democratization of communication allow every individual to participate in the dissemination of da'wah messages without going through strict institutional gatekeeping. This condition creates opportunities for diversification of voices in religious discourse, but also poses the risk of spreading messages that are not in accordance with the principles of religious moderation (Maharani et al., 2025). In the context of digital *wasathiyyah*, a strong self-regulation mechanism is needed from preachers to ensure that the messages disseminated adhere to the values of balance and moderation.

The case study of the Gus Miftah controversy illustrates how a lack of understanding of the principles of digital *wasathiyyah* can lead to significant backlash on social media. In the case of the controversy with tea sellers, the analysis reveals that the way messages are conveyed, which tends to belittle certain professions, is contrary to the principles of religious moderation that emphasize respect for human dignity (Rahman & Sari, 2023). The strong public reaction to this case reflects

society's expectations for preachers to uphold high ethical standards in their communication, especially on digital platforms that have a wide reach.

The implementation of digital *wasathiyyah* is also related to the selection of content and the right timing in delivering da'wah messages. Social media algorithms that prioritize engagement can encourage da'i to create sensational or controversial content in order to gain greater attention (Pangestu & Ulum, 2022). However, this approach is contrary to the principle of religious moderation, which emphasizes the delivery of messages that are wise and do not cause slander or social conflict.

An analysis of digital da'wah content reveals a tendency towards polarization in conveying religious messages. Some da'i tend to use an extreme approach in conveying criticism of differences of opinion or different religious practices. This condition reflects a lack of understanding of the principle of *wasathiyyah*, which emphasizes an inclusive and tolerant attitude towards differences (Subiakto, 2022; Karim et al, 2025). In the digital context, this polarization can be amplified by algorithms that display similar content to users with the same preferences.

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The principle of religious moderation in digital da'wah also includes aspects of verification and accuracy of information. The digital era has enabled the rapid dissemination of information, but it has also created the risk of spreading hoaxes or inaccurate information. Da'i have a moral responsibility to verify the accuracy of information before disseminating it, especially when it relates to sensitive religious issues (Budiantoro, 2017). The implementation of digital *wasathiyyah* requires da'i to be careful and responsible in using social media as a da'wah platform.

The concept of digital *wasathiyyah* also includes an understanding of the cultural and social context of the da'wah audience. Social media allows da'i to reach a very diverse audience from various cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. The da'wah message delivered must be understandable and accepted by a diverse audience without causing misunderstanding or conflict (Arifuddin, 2016).

This requires a da'i to have cultural sensitivity and good cross-cultural communication skills. Religious moderation in digital da'wah is also related to the wise use of technology. Social media features, such as live streaming, stories, and various multimedia content formats, can be utilized to enhance the effectiveness of da'wah, provided they are used in consideration of the social impact and ethics of communication (Briandana et al., 2020). Da'i needs to understand the characteristics of each social media platform and use them in accordance with the principles of religious moderation. Berikut analisis evaluasi konten dakwah digital terhadap indikator implementasi moderasi beragama di ruang digital.

Table 1. Analysis of two controversial cases and evaluation based on religious moderation indicators according to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) and Quraish Shihab (2020): (RI, 2019; Shihab, 2020)

	Moderation Indicators	Manifestation in case studies	Assessment
JID 324	National Commitment	Gus Miftah's position as Special Presidential Envoy demonstrates alignment with national values. However, his public behavior undermines institutional credibility.	Partially compromised - institutional authority is not aligned with personal behavior.
	Tolerance and Diversity	Da'wah at the Bethel Church of Indonesia demonstrates interfaith tolerance	Positive intention
	Non-Violence and Respect	Verbal rudeness towards an iced tea seller constitutes symbolic violence; it is a lack of dignity towards economically vulnerable individuals.	Violated - a clear violation of the principle of respect
	Cultural Accommodation	Da'wah in nightclubs represents cultural adaptation but raises questions about proper contextualization.	Debated - the balance between accessibility and suitability is unclear

Source: From an analysis of 1,847 comments on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Popular articles

Table 1 illustrates the paradox of implementing religious moderation on social media. The case of Gus Miftah versus an iced tea seller reveals the tension between the popularity of a preacher and ethical communication practices. Although the content does not contain radical or anti-state narratives, the use of derogatory language in a viral TikTok video with 3.2 million views violates the principles of tolerance and verbal violence (Samsudin & Putri, 2023). Sentiment analysis of 1,847 comments reveals that netizens believe these words do not align with the morals of a preacher who should serve as an example (Redaksi, 2024; Surya, 2024).

Interview with a religious figure named TA emphasized that, *“Moderation is not just about being non-radical, but also about how we treat others. A preacher can be theologically moderate but socially extreme if he belittles the weak”* (TA, 2024). This finding aligns with the observations of Arifianto (2019) and Baulch & Pramiyanti (2018), who note that religious moderation in Indonesia faces challenges not only from ideological extremism but also from unethical communication practices exacerbated by social media algorithms (Arifianto, 2020; Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018).

In contrast, the case of Da'wah in non-conventional spaces (Bethel Church Indonesia and a nightclub) demonstrates a better implementation of religious moderation. The video of Da'wah at Bethel Church, uploaded by the Kajian Rutin Channel, received 951,977 views, 620,000 likes, and positive comments. It was uploaded on May 6, 2021, generating appreciation for the dialogical and tolerant approach (Kajian Rutin, 2021). An interview with a digital preacher named DL explained, *“Da'wah in non-conventional settings can be an example of moderation if it is done with permission, with mutual respect, and without coercion. This aligns with the principle of*

wasathiyyah, which accommodates context" (DL, 2024). Then, regarding the case of da'wah in a non-conventional space, namely a nightclub, based on interviews with informants, DK said that he wanted to reach people outside the boundaries of traditional places of worship. However, it should be noted that this action sparked a heated debate about the ethical boundaries of da'wah (the appropriateness of the venue) for da'wah (DK, 2024). This finding strengthens Campbell & Evolvi's (2020) argument that successful digital da'wah requires contextual sensitivity and adaptability of methods (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

Analysis of Digital Da'wah Communication Based on Harold Lasswell's Theory

Harold Lasswell's communication theory, with the formula "*Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect*," provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of digital da'wah communication. In the context of digital da'wah, each element in Lasswell's formula undergoes a significant transformation, affecting the effectiveness and impact of da'wah communication (Kuswana et al., 2023).

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First, the "*Who*" element in digital da'wah communication has undergone significant democratization. If in conventional da'wah, the da'i figure is generally an individual who has institutionally recognized religious authority, then in digital da'wah, every individual can become a da'i without going through a formal legitimacy process (Sihabudin et al., 2024). This condition creates a diversification of sources of da'wah messages, but also poses challenges in terms of credibility and accountability. In the case of Gus Miftah, the analysis reveals that the credibility of a da'i on social media depends not only on their religious authority but also on their ability to build personal branding and engage with digital audiences. Gus Miftah, as a da'i figure with a pesantren background and extensive da'wah experience, has faced controversy, which highlights that traditional authority does not always shield da'i figures from public criticism on social media.

Second, the "*What*" element in digital Da'wah is related to the content of the message conveyed. An analysis of digital Da'wah content reveals a tendency to package Da'wah messages in attractive and viral formats, such as short videos, memes, infographics, and other multimedia content. However, this attractive packaging often sacrifices the depth and substance of the Da'wah message. In the case of the Gus Miftah controversy, the analysis reveals that the primary issue lies not in the substance of the Da'wah message but in the method of delivery, which is considered not in accordance with communication ethics. The transformation of Da'wah messages in digital format also faces challenges in terms of contextualization. Da'wah messages conveyed in digital format often lose the temporal and spatial context that is important for proper understanding. Videos or audio recordings made in a specific context can be distributed and interpreted in different contexts, leading to misunderstandings.

Third, the "*Which channel*" element in digital Da'wah refers to the various social media platforms used to spread Da'wah messages. Each platform has different characteristics, algorithms, and audiences, requiring a tailored communication strategy. YouTube is often used for longer and more educational da'wah content, Instagram for interesting visual content, and TikTok for short and viral content. In contrast, Twitter is used for discussions and quick responses to current issues. An analysis of the Gus Miftah case reveals that selecting the right platform has a significant impact on the reception of da'wah messages. The same content can elicit different responses when

distributed on different platforms. This is related to differences in audience characteristics and communication norms that apply to each platform.

Fourth, the “*To whom*” element in digital Da’wah has experienced significant expansion. If conventional Da’wah is generally limited to a particular congregation or community, then digital Da’wah can reach a much more diverse global audience. However, this diversity of audiences also creates challenges in terms of adjusting messages to the characteristics of different audiences. Social media algorithms also play a role in determining who will receive the Da’wah message. Algorithms tend to display content to users who have similar preferences, thus creating an echo chamber that reduces audience diversity. This condition can hinder the function of Da’wah as a means of spreading messages to a wider and more diverse audience.

Fifth, the “*With what effect*” element in digital Da’wah is related to the impact or influence caused by the Da’wah message. Social media enables easier impact measurement through various metrics, including views, likes, shares, and comments. However, these quantitative metrics do not always reflect the actual qualitative impact of the Da’wah message. In the case of the Gus Miftah controversy, analysis reveals that the negative impact of da’wah content can spread more rapidly and widely than its positive impact. This is related to the phenomenon of negativity bias in communication psychology, where negative information tends to be more easily remembered and spread than positive information. This condition requires da’i to be more careful in conveying da’wah messages on social media.

Analysis of the ethics of Islamic communication using Harold Lasswell's framework, contextualized for digital media, as follows: (Lasswell, 2018)

Table 2: Comprehensive evaluation based on five elements of communication

Elemen Lasswell	Ethical Indicators	Gus Miftah Case	Unconventional Cases	Interview Findings
WHO (Communicator)	Scientific Credibility	Alums of Tebuireng Islamic boarding school	Good academic background	13/15 informants: Credibility is important, but not enough
	Moral Integrity	Inconsistency between teachings and practices	Consistent with the values taught	15/15 informants: Integrity is crucial in the digital age
	Digital Competence	Expert in using platforms	Adaptive to the media	12/15 informants: Digital ethics training is needed
SAYS WHAT (Message)	Depth of Substance	Popular content but lacking depth	Substantial & contextual messages	10/15 informants: Substance is often sacrificed for virality
	Citation Accuracy	General references	Clear & valid references	14/15 informants: Accuracy of

Elemen Lasswell	Ethical Indicators	Gus Miftah Case	Unconventional Cases	Interview Findings
IN WHICH CHANNEL (Media)				references is often overlooked
	Contextual Relevance	Lack of context sensitivity	Highly contextual	15/15 informants: Contextualization is key to moderation
	Platform Appropriateness	Target-appropriate platforms	Multi-platform effectiveness	11/15 informants: Strategic platform selection
	Format Optimization	Viral format (short video)	Not yet optimal	13/15 informants: Format > substance is a risk
TO WHOM (Audiens)	Understanding Needs	One-size-fits-all approach	Tailored for the audience	12/15 informants: Audience segmentation is important
	Feedback Response	Defensive against criticism	Open to dialogue	14/15 informants: Transparency is key to learning
WITH WHAT EFFECT (Impact)	Positive Attitude Change	Critical comments	Positive response	Validated by social media data
	Effective Learning	Focus on the controversy	Opens new perspectives	Confirmed by interview analysis

Table 2 reveals the ethical complexity of digital da'wah communication. Interview findings indicate a consensus among experts (13/15 informants) that scientific credibility alone is insufficient without moral integrity in practice. According to informant WD, a communications expert, *“In the digital age, inconsistencies between what is taught and what is practiced will quickly become exposed and go viral. Social media algorithms actually amplify these controversies”* (WD, 2024). This was proven in the case of Gus Miftah, where despite having high academic credibility as an alumnus of the Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School, the verbal incident against an iced tea seller resulted in a massive negative response (of which 521 comments were critical), triggering the trending topic #GusMiftah, #esteh on Instagram with 123,000 viewers in 24 hours (Bibir, 2024).

Content analysis showed that 10 of the 15 digital preachers interviewed acknowledged the pressure to *“go viral at all costs”*, often sacrificing the depth of their message. A digital preacher named DA explained: *“The TikTok and Instagram Reels algorithms prioritize short, emotional content. This tempts many preachers to create sensational but shallow content”* (DA, 2024). This phenomenon aligns with Rathje's (2024) findings, which suggest that social media algorithms tend to promote content that triggers emotions and high engagement, rather than high-quality or educational content (Rathje et al., 2024).

In contrast, the approach to Da'wah in non-conventional spaces demonstrates a better implementation of communication ethics, particularly in the *“Says What”* and *“To Whom”* elements. Bethel Church's Da'wah content demonstrates high contextual sensitivity by adapting language, examples, and approaches to suit an interfaith audience. This 10-minute, 42-second video maintains an average watch time of 7 minutes, 26 seconds, demonstrating that substantial content

with an ethical approach can engage viewers. According to an informant, an Islamic religious figure in Bandung, FMA, stated, *“This is an example of how Da’wah can be moderate, ethical, and effective at the same time. The key lies in a deep understanding of the audience and context”* (FMA, 2024).

JID | 328 *The Role of Social Media Algorithms in Shaping Public Perception of Digital Da’wah*

Social media algorithms play a very significant role in determining the reach, visibility, and impact of digital Da’wah content. Understanding how algorithms work is crucial for preachers to optimize the dissemination of Da’wah messages while maintaining the quality and integrity of their communication. Social media algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement, which often does not align with the goals of Da’wah, which emphasize quality and spiritual impact. Engagement-driven algorithms tend to prioritize content that evokes strong emotional reactions, including content that is controversial or sensational. In the context of Da’wah, this condition can encourage preachers to create content that attracts attention in ways that are not always in accordance with the principles of religious moderation (Hamid, 2025). Analysis of the Gus Miftah case reveals that content that causes controversy tends to receive a larger algorithmic boost, resulting in wider dissemination and a more significant impact.

The filter bubble and echo chamber phenomena created by social media algorithms also have important implications for digital da'wah. Algorithms tend to display content that matches users' previous preferences and behavior, thus creating a relatively homogeneous communication space. In the context of da'wah, this condition can hinder the function of da'wah as a medium for reaching diverse audiences and fostering cross-group dialogue. Social media algorithms also have certain biases in determining which content is promoted or suppressed (Mukhtar, 2022). These biases can be cultural, linguistic, or regional, affecting the visibility of da'wah content. Da'wah content in Indonesian or with a local cultural context may have limited reach compared to content in English or with a more universal context. Timing and consistency of posting are also important factors that affect algorithm performance. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize content posted at certain times when user engagement is high. Da'i need to understand the activity patterns of their audience in order to optimize the reach of da'wah content (Budiantoro, 2017).

In the case of Gus Miftah's Da’wah at the Bethel Church of Indonesia, analysis shows that social media algorithms play a role in amplifying controversy through the viral spreading mechanism. Content that generates intense debate tends to get higher priority in the algorithm because it generates high engagement through comments, shares, and emotional reactions. This shows how algorithms can strengthen the polarization of public opinion towards Da’wah practices that are considered controversial. The algorithmic optimization strategy carried out by preachers also has ethical implications that need to be considered. The use of trending hashtags, clickbait titles, or attractive thumbnails can increase the visibility of Da’wah content, but also risks shifting the focus from the substance of the message to the technical aspects of algorithm optimization (Mukhtar, 2022). This condition requires preachers to find a balance between technical optimization and the integrity of the Da’wah message. Algorithms also influence the formation of public perception through the social proof mechanism. Da’wah content that receives high engagement tends to be considered more credible and of higher quality by the audience. However, this does not always reflect the quality of the message itself. In the case of the Gus Miftah controversy, analysis reveals

that public perception of the case is significantly influenced by how the algorithm presents various perspectives and responses to the case (Philips, 2016).

The phenomenon of algorithmic amplification can also strengthen confirmation bias in the consumption of da'wah content. Users who hold certain views on a religious issue tend to be shown content that reinforces those views, thereby reducing the likelihood of being exposed to different perspectives. This condition can hinder the function of da'wah as a medium for learning and open dialogue. Social media algorithms also have an impact on the sustainability of da'wah content. Content that goes viral at one time can quickly lose visibility when the algorithm switches to prioritizing newer content. This requires da'i to develop a sustainable content strategy, rather than relying solely on momentary virality (Sugiarto & Farid, 2023). Therefore, social media algorithms play a crucial role in determining the reach and impact of Islamic Da'wah content (Adam & Magaji, 2025; Hastuti et al., 2025).

Table 3. Comparative analysis of content performance across platforms

Platform	Case	Views	Dominant sentiment	Factor Algorithm
TikTok	Gus Miftah vs Iced Tea Seller	8.7M (total 28 videos)	Negatif	Controversy, high emotions
	Church da'wah	2.1M (1 video)	Positif	Novelty, educational
YouTube	Gus Miftah vs Iced Tea Seller	2.3M (15 video)	Mixed (positif-negatif)	Long duration, discussion
	Church da'wah	1.8M (3 video)	Positif	High Completion rate
Instagram	Gus Miftah vs Iced Tea Seller	890K (42 post)	Negatif	Visual impact, shares
	Church da'wah	567K (18 post)	Positif	Story engagement
Popular Articles	Gus Miftah vs Iced Tea Seller	234 K Read	Very negative	Trending topic
	Church da'wah	45K Read	Positif	Niche conversation

Source: Data analysis from TikTok Analytics, YouTube Studio, Instagram Insights, and popular articles for the period December 2024 (Bibir, 2024; Diva, 2024; John, 2024; Junior001, 2024; Kajian Rutin, 2021; Setyawan, 2024; Surya, 2024; Susanto, 2024; Titik Kumpul, 2024).

Table 3 shows a consistent pattern: controversial content with negative emotional content tends to receive greater amplification from social media algorithms, especially on TikTok. The Gus Miftah vs. trader case garnered 1.2 million views on TikTok (across 23 videos), significantly surpassing the views of positive Islamic Da'wah content in non-conventional venues (2.1 million views). This phenomenon aligns with Adam & Magaji's (2024) findings that social media algorithms optimize engagement without considering the quality or ethics of the content, thereby systematically rewarding content that triggers outrage and polarization (Adam & Magaji, 2025).

According to an informant, RA, one explained this mechanism: “TikTok's algorithm uses a For You Page (FYP) system that prioritizes watch time, shares, and comments. Gus Miftah's controversial video triggered a strong emotional reaction, which the algorithm interpreted as 'engaging content,' leading to wider distribution. This creates a dangerous feedback loop where provocative content continues to be amplified” (RA, 2024). This finding aligns with Hastuti et al.'s (2025) research on the algorithmic influences on news production, which demonstrates that the

logic of algorithmic visibility compresses the verification window and accelerates newsroom temporality, prioritizing speed over depth (Hastuti et al., 2025).

JID | 330 Interviews with 15 informants revealed that only two of the 15 digital preachers had a sufficient understanding of how social media algorithms work. According to informant WD, “*I focus on content, not realizing that the way I create a title or thumbnail can influence who sees it and how they react*” (WD, 2024). This ignorance risks leading preachers to unconsciously follow algorithmic logic that prioritizes virality over substance and ethics, as warned by Rathje et al. (2024). According to Rathje et al. (2024), people believe that social media algorithms amplify divisive content, even though they wish otherwise.

The implication of these findings is the need for algorithmic literacy as a mandatory competency for digital preachers. According to informant AZ, a religious figure, “*Preachers must understand that they are not only competing with other preachers, but also with algorithmic logic that can alter the meaning and impact of their messages. Without this understanding, digital Da’wah risks falling into a ‘virality trap’, which actually undermines the mission of Da’wah itself*” (AZ, 2024). The concept of the “*virality trap*” refers to the phenomenon where preachers are tempted to create sensational content to go viral, which actually damages the credibility and effectiveness of long-term Da’wah (Adam & Magaji, 2025).

Case Analysis of Gus Miftah vs. Tea Seller: Bukti dari Media Sosial

The controversial case between Gus Miftah and a tea seller, which went viral on social media in 2024, provides important lessons about the ethics of Da’wah in a digital context (Inilah.com, 2024). Analysis of this case using the framework of religious moderation reveals a discrepancy between the Da’wah method employed and the principles of Islamic *wasathiyyah*. This case began with a video showing Gus Miftah interacting with a tea seller in a tone considered demeaning and disrespectful to the tea seller's dignity as a hard worker (Surya, 2024). Content analysis reveals that the primary issue in this case stems from ineffective communication, which fails to reflect the moral values that should underpin Islamic Da’wah. The principle of religious moderation emphasizes the importance of respecting every individual, regardless of their social or economic status. In the context of Da’wah, preachers should serve as role models in their interactions with all levels of society, maintaining a polite and respectful attitude.

The public response to this case indicates a shift in public expectations regarding the behavior of preachers in the digital era. Social media has increased transparency regarding the behavior of public figures, including preachers, so that every action and statement can go viral and receive intense public scrutiny. This condition requires preachers to maintain consistency between the Da’wah message conveyed and their daily behavior. Analysis using Lasswell's communication theory shows that in this case, the elements of “*what*” (message) and “*how*” (*method of delivery*) are inconsistency. Although the substance of the Da’wah message conveyed by Gus Miftah may be good, the way it was conveyed, which was considered inappropriate, caused controversy that diverted attention from the message's substance to its ethical aspects of communication. This case also illustrates how context collapse in social media can lead to problems. Videos that were recorded in a specific context with a particular audience can be disseminated to a broader context with a different audience, leading to interpretations that diverge from the original intention. This

phenomenon requires preachers to always consider the possibility of distributing their content to a wider audience.

Gus Miftah's response to this controversy is also an important part of the analysis. The way a preacher responds to criticism and controversy can affect the public's perception of their credibility and integrity. In this case, a response that displays a defensive attitude or fails to admit mistakes can exacerbate the public's negative perception. The lessons from this case show the importance of digital literacy for preachers. They need to understand that every interaction in public spaces, including those recorded on video, can go viral and receive widespread attention. Therefore, consistency in behaving according to the values taught is very important. This case also underlines the importance of understanding the dynamics of social class in Da'wah. Effective Da'wah should be able to reach all levels of society without making them feel belittled or unappreciated. The principle of religious moderation teaches the importance of inclusive Da'wah and respecting the diversity of audience backgrounds.

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Digital content analysis reveals complex patterns in the intersection of religious moderation and communication ethics in contemporary da'wah practices (Mudhofi et al, 2023). The Gus Miftah incident serves as a paradigmatic case demonstrating how digital platforms amplify both ethical violations and public accountability mechanisms in religious communication. The original content, posted on TikTok by @inilahcom, documents an incident during the Magelang Bersholawat event on November 20, 2024, in which Gus Miftah, then the President's Special Envoy for Religious Harmony, made a derogatory remark to an iced tea seller. The statement, "*Es tehmu sih akeh ora? (Do you still have any iced tea?) ya sana jual gobl*k (Yes, go sell it, you stupid)*", was captured on video, generating 3 million views in 72 hours and sparking extensive public discourse (Inilahcom, 2024). Expert analysis by Prof. Dadang Kuswana emphasizes the violation of fundamental Islamic communication ethics, stating, "*The incident represents a clear deviation from the prophetic model of Da'wah, which emphasizes gentle speech (qawlan layinan), kindness to those of lower economic status, and dignified treatment of all individuals regardless of social standing. The Prophet Muhammad's behavior toward merchants and workers was polite, a clear contradiction to the behavior demonstrated in this case*" (DK, 2024).

The algorithmic amplification of this content across various platforms demonstrates the viral dynamics characteristic of controversial religious content. YouTube content creator accounts produced response videos, with one analysis by Harian Surya garnering over 500,651 views in a week (Surya, 2024).

Gus Miftah's Da'wah Controversy in Non-Conventional Spaces: Case Analysis at the Indonesian Bethel Church and Nightclubs

The case of Gus Miftah's Da'wah at the Indonesian Bethel Church in 2021 and at a nightclub presents a complex discussion about the appropriate methods and places for Da'wah in the context of religious and social plurality (Redaksi, 2024). Analysis of this case using the framework of religious moderation shows a tension between the spirit of inclusive Da'wah and the need to respect the space and sensitivity of other communities. Da'wah in the church as a place of worship for other religions raises questions about the ethics of interfaith Da'wah. The principle of religious moderation emphasizes the importance of dialogue and cooperation between religious

communities, while also stressing the need to respect the sacred space and sensitivity of other religious communities (Wowiling & Dadi, 2022). In this case, although the Da'wah was carried out by invitation and in the context of interfaith dialogue, it still caused controversy because it was considered inconsistent with the protocol and ethics of interfaith communication. Content analysis reveals that the public's response to this case was polarized between those who supported the spirit of inclusive Da'wah and those who criticized it for not considering the sensitivity of the Christian community. This polarization is reinforced by social media algorithms that tend to display content tailored to user preferences, thereby creating an echo chamber that reinforces the position of each group.

The case of Da'wah in a nightclub also raises debate about contextual appropriateness in Islamic Da'wah. From the perspective of religious moderation, Da'wah should be able to reach all segments of society, including those in environments considered contrary to Islamic values. However, the methods and approaches of Da'wah in places such as nightclubs require special sensitivity to avoid the impression of being judgmental or morally superior. Analysis using the theory of Da'wah communication reveals that the choice of place and context for Da'wah significantly impacts the effectiveness of message delivery. Da'wah in unconventional places can attract media attention and public discourse, but also risks shifting focus from the substance of the message to the sensational aspects of the place or method of Da'wah. This case also shows the importance of understanding audience analysis in digital Da'wah. Da'wah content recorded in churches or nightclubs is not only consumed by the audience who are physically present, but also by a much wider and more diverse digital audience. The diversity of this audience necessitates that preachers consider the various perspectives and reactions that may arise (Saumantri, 2023).

The response of the Christian community to Da'wah in churches and the response of various groups to Da'wah in nightclubs show the importance of cultural sensitivity in contemporary Da'wah. Religious moderation teaches the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural and social context in which Da'wah is carried out. Learning from this case shows the need to develop protocols or guidelines for Da'wah in non-conventional spaces. Effective Da'wah should be able to reach various segments of society, but with methods and approaches that are appropriate to the context and sensitivity of the target community.

Implications of Viral Da'wah on Religious Moderation

The viral phenomenon in digital Da'wah has significant implications for the implementation of religious moderation. Viral Da'wah content can have a positive impact on spreading religious messages to a wide audience. However, it also has the potential to cause message distortion and polarization that is contrary to the principle of *wasathiyah* (Hamdi et al., 2021). Analysis of various cases of viral Da'wah content shows certain patterns that need to be understood to optimize positive potential while minimizing negative risks. The characteristics of viral content generally include strong emotional elements, relevance to current issues, and ease of sharing. In the context of Da'wah, content that exhibits these characteristics is often considered controversial or sensational and may not align with the principle of religious moderation (RI, 2019). This creates a dilemma for preachers between the desire to reach a wide audience through viral content and the need to maintain the quality and ethics of Da'wah messages.

The positive impacts of viral Da'wah include increasing awareness of religious issues, forming public discussions about Islamic values, and increasing community involvement in religious activities. However, the negative impacts can be the oversimplification of complex messages, the formation of negative stereotypes about Islam, and increasing social polarization. In the case of Gus Miftah, the analysis shows that the virality of Da'wah content can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, viral content increases the visibility and reach of Da'wah messages. However, on the other hand, it can cause backlash that damages the credibility of preachers and the image of Islam in general. This shows the importance of quality control in the production of digital Da'wah content. Social media algorithms play a crucial role in determining which Da'wah content goes viral. Understanding how algorithms work can help preachers create content that reaches a wide audience without compromising the quality of the message. However, this also requires preachers to have adequate digital literacy.

The viral phenomenon also affects the audience's attention span to da'wah content. Viral content generally has a short duration and a simple message, while comprehensive da'wah messages often require longer and more in-depth explanations. This condition requires da'i to develop a communication strategy that can package complex messages in an attractive and easily digestible format. Religious moderation in the context of viral da'wah is also related to managing public expectations. Viral content often creates high expectations for da'i to consistently produce interesting content. This pressure can encourage da'i to create sensational or controversial content in order to maintain popularity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that da'wah within a digital framework presents complex challenges in implementing the principle of religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*). The digital era has fundamentally transformed the landscape of Islamic da'wah, creating opportunities for wider reach but also creating new risks in terms of the quality, ethics, and social impact of da'wah messages. An analysis of two controversial case studies involving Gus Miftah offers important lessons about the dynamics of digital da'wah in the Indonesian context.

The main findings of this study are as follows: *First*, the implementation of religious moderation in digital da'wah necessitates significant adaptation to the unique characteristics of social media. The principle of *wasathiyyah*, which emphasizes balance, tolerance, and wisdom, must be translated into digital communication practices that take into account social media algorithms, audience diversity, and the potential for viral spreading. Effective and moderate digital da'wah requires a deep understanding of the dynamics of digital communication, algorithm literacy, and sensitivity to the socio-cultural context of the audience. *Second*, analysis using Harold Lasswell's communication theory reveals that every element in the da'wah communication process transforms the digital context. The democratization of message sources, diversification of content formats, multiplicity of platforms, audience expansion, and complexity of impacts create new challenges that require a holistic approach to managing digital da'wah. Da'i need to develop digital competencies that include not only technical skills, but also an understanding of digital communication ethics and the social impact of the content being disseminated. *Third*, the role of social media algorithms in shaping public perception of digital da'wah shows the importance of understanding the

mechanisms of technology in da'wah communication strategies. Algorithms that prioritize engagement can encourage da'i to create sensational or controversial content, which is contrary to the principle of religious moderation. Therefore, a wise approach is necessary to optimize algorithms for Da'wah without compromising the quality and ethics of the message.

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The case studies in this article demonstrate that controversies in digital da'wah are often related to inconsistencies between communication methods and the values taught. The case of Gus Miftah versus the tea seller highlights the importance of consistency between the da'wah message and the da'i's behavior. Conversely, the case of da'wah in non-conventional spaces underscores the need for contextual sensitivity in cross-cultural and inter-religious da'wah. The lessons from these cases show that effective digital da'wah requires not only technical competence, but also emotional and spiritual maturity from the da'i. The viral phenomenon in digital da'wah presents a dilemma between the desire to reach a wide audience and the need to maintain the quality of the message. This study demonstrates that virality does not always correlate with the effectiveness of da'wah and can even have negative impacts if not properly managed. Religious moderation in the context of viral da'wah requires a balanced approach between technical optimization and spiritual integrity.

The practical implications of this study include the need to develop guidelines or protocols for digital da'wah based on the principle of religious moderation. Da'i need to be equipped with comprehensive digital literacy, including an understanding of social media algorithms, digital communication ethics, and crisis management in a digital context. Additionally, a quality assurance mechanism is necessary in the production of digital da'wah content to ensure compliance with the values of *wasathiyah*. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the integration of three distinct theoretical approaches to analyze the phenomenon of digital da'wah. The combination of religious moderation theory, da'wah communication theory, and algorithm studies theory provides a holistic perspective in understanding the complexity of digital da'wah. The analytical framework developed in this study can be used to analyze other digital da'wah phenomena and develop more effective and moderate da'wah strategies.

Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of a moderate and ethical approach in digital da'wah. The digital era presents significant opportunities for disseminating positive religious messages. However, it also demands great responsibility from the da'i to maintain the quality and social impact of the content being disseminated. The implementation of the principle of religious moderation in digital da'wah is not only important for the effectiveness of communication but also crucial for maintaining social harmony and a positive image of Islam in the digital era.

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