

## Hyper-personalization in digital da'wah: A critical constructivist analysis of NU Online's YouTube channel

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### Abstract

This study examines audiovisual representations, linguistic styles, and audience interactions that shape hyper-personalization in digital preaching on the NU Online YouTube channel. This study confirms that digital preaching not only disseminates religious messages but also creates symbolic closeness, authority, and emotional intimacy through mediated communication, using the critical constructivism framework. Narrative transcription, visual coding, and audience comment analysis were used to analyse the qualitative content of ten videos uploaded from January to September 2025. Three main components that shape hyper-personalization are revealed by the research results: (1) visual strategies such as stable lighting, close framing, and minimalist backgrounds that enhance the image of *da'i* as a calm and composed figure; (2) conversational language style that uses personal pronouns to make the message feel individually addressed; and (3) audience emotional responses that form parasocial relationships. NU Online's research results not only disseminate religious knowledge but also establish religious authority through algorithms and emotional appeal. Therefore, to avoid excessive emotional dependence and maintain the authenticity of da'wah in the digital world, one must adhere to ethical standards. This study contributes to the practice of Islamic communication in digital spaces by integrating media logic with Islamic ethical principles.

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi audiovisual, gaya linguistik, dan interaksi audiens yang membentuk hiperpersonalisasi dalam dakwah digital di kanal YouTube NU Online. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa dakwah digital tidak hanya menyebarkan pesan keagamaan, tetapi juga menciptakan kedekatan simbolik, otoritas, dan keintiman emosional melalui komunikasi yang dimediasi, menggunakan kerangka Critical Constructivism. Transkripsi naratif, pengodean visual, dan analisis komentar audiens digunakan untuk menganalisis isi kualitatif dari sepuluh video yang diunggah dari Januari hingga September 2025. Tiga

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komponen utama yang membentuk hiperpersonalisasi ditunjukkan oleh hasil penelitian: (1) strategi visual seperti pencahayaan stabil, framing dekat, dan latar minimalis yang meningkatkan citra *da'i* sebagai figur yang tenang; (2) gaya bahasa percakapan yang menggunakan pronomina pribadi yang membuat pesan terasa ditujukan secara individual; dan (3) respons emosional audiens yang membentuk hubungan parasosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa NU Online tidak hanya menyebarkan pengetahuan agama tetapi juga membentuk otoritas keagamaan melalui algoritma dan sentuhan emosional. Dengan demikian, untuk menghindari ketergantungan emosional yang berlebihan dan menjaga keaslian dakwah, komunikasi Islam di dunia digital harus tetap berpegang pada etika. Studi ini berkontribusi pada praktik komunikasi Islam di ruang digital dengan mengintegrasikan logika media dan prinsip-prinsip etika Islam.

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Islamic preaching in the digital age has undergone a major transformation with the emergence of platforms such as YouTube. This platform not only serves as a medium for spreading religious messages but also as a place to build new religious identities, relationships, and authority. Due to its friendly, emotive content, easily accessible to the younger generation, YouTube NU Online has become one of the most prominent channels for preaching in this context.

Hyper-personalization is a phenomenon in which audiences feel emotionally close to *da'i*, even though the relationship is built digitally and symbolically through this pattern of communication. The concept of hyper-personal communication aligns with this phenomenon. Walther explains that technological mediation, image management, and message selection processes cause online interactions to become overly intimate (Walther, 1996).

Digital media is considered a space for producing reality that is full of certain ideologies, values, and social constructs, according to critical constructivism (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Therefore, the relationship between *da'is* and their audience on YouTube must be understood as the result of symbolic constructs influenced by the platform's algorithmic logic, performativity, visual aesthetics, and communication strategies. Digital *da'wah* here not only conveys teachings; it also creates new images, feelings, and religious authority.

Previous studies have highlighted the role of digital *da'wah* in religious moderation and social behavior (Salendra, 2024). Conversely, studies such as Nur & Riyadi (2023) and Aprilyawati & Nurudin (2022) found that digital *da'wah* content often utilizes branding strategies and conveys certain ideologies. Ichwan et al. (2024) show

how digitalization encourages the formation of a new religious culture in the Society 5.0 era by providing an overview of the features of digital da'wah. However, studies that specifically examine how hyper-personalization is constructed through the interplay of audiovisual presentation, communicative performance, audience interaction, and platform algorithms on YouTube remain limited. Consequently, little is known about how these elements collectively shape perceptions of religious authority and emotional intimacy in digital da'wah.

Beyond addressing the existing research gap, this study is significant because it extends the discussion of digital da'wah beyond issues of message dissemination and audience engagement toward the construction of religious communication itself. While previous studies have primarily examined digital da'wah from the perspectives of religious moderation, digital literacy, branding, or media utilization, this research highlights how emotional closeness is strategically constructed through audiovisual design, linguistic choices, performative communication, and platform affordances. By integrating Walther's hyper-personal communication theory with the perspective of critical constructivism, this study offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how digital religious authority and audience intimacy are socially and technologically produced rather than naturally occurring.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the development of Islamic communication scholarship by introducing the concept of ethical hyper-personal communication as a model for understanding contemporary digital da'wah. Rather than viewing hyper-personalization solely as a technological consequence or a communication strategy, this study argues that emotional intimacy can coexist with Islamic communication ethics when supported by institutional authority, scholarly legitimacy, and moral responsibility. It, therefore, provides both theoretical and practical contributions by offering a conceptual framework for developing digital da'wah strategies that remain effective within algorithm-driven media environments while preserving the fundamental Islamic principles and ethical responsibility.

It is crucial to understand how emotional connection on YouTube is shaped by message content, visual techniques and styles, the preacher's performativity, and algorithms. This is because there has been a shift in how religious communication occurs. According to Critical Constructivism (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), every digital communication process is a social construction that produces specific representations, such as religious imagery, authority relationships, and collective emotions. Therefore, the phenomenon of pseudo-intimacy in YouTube da'wah is constructed by media practices, technological structures, and audience preferences rather than arising naturally.

This study aims to examine how hyper-personal closeness is constructed in NU Online's digital YouTube da'wah. How hyper-personalization is constructed in NU Online's digital da'wah through language, visuals, the performativity of the *dai*, and interactions in the comments section reflects the tension between social performativity and spiritual truth. The ultimate goal is to provide a critique of the value of Islamic communication in digital da'wah practices, so that algorithmic media culture remains committed to the principles of honesty, sincerity, and moral responsibility.

## METHODS

To understand how the NU Online YouTube Channel shapes and personalizes its da'wah messages, this study uses a critical constructivism approach. According to critical constructivism, language, media, and power relations shape social reality. This method is particularly relevant for studying how the YouTube platform shapes an intimate, dialogical style of da'wah that is guided by audience preferences, because digital media not only represent reality but also actively construct it. The research took place from January to September 2025 and included phases of data collection, online observation, transcription, and document analysis.

According to Schreier (2012), qualitative content analysis is used to identify themes, communication patterns, and personalization strategies in audiovisual content. To better understand how religious messages are constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in the context of digital media, this analysis employs a critical constructivist approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can explore strategies of emotional closeness that cannot be explained by quantitative analysis, as well as meaning, symbols, and language style (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The data source comprised 10 videos posted on the NU Online YouTube channel between January and September 2025. Purposive sampling was used to choose the videos based on three criteria: (1) they featured Islamic preaching or religious instruction; (2) they showed a direct and intimate communication style between the preacher and the audience; and (3) they produced observable audience engagement through likes, views, and comments. These standards were used to make sure the chosen movies were pertinent to the analysis of how hyper-personalization is constructed in digital da'wah. A more thorough investigation of personalization techniques throughout NU Online's digital content was made possible by the sample's representation of differences in preacher traits, communication styles, topic content, and visual presentation (Patton, 2015). To investigate how relationships between the *da'i* and audiences were symbolically constructed in the digital environment, information was gathered through narrative transcription, visual observation, and analysis of communication elements,

such as speech style, message framing, gestures, visual design, and the use of religious terminology.

The analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, theme division, and critical interpretation. In the interpretation stage, the Critical Constructivism Framework was used to understand how NU Online not only disseminates religious messages but also constructs specific ideas about religious authority, emotional closeness, and *dai-jamaah* relationships in the digital world. This research can investigate how da'wah messages are personalized and negotiated within a platform ecosystem controlled by algorithms, digital performativity, and user preferences using this method (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

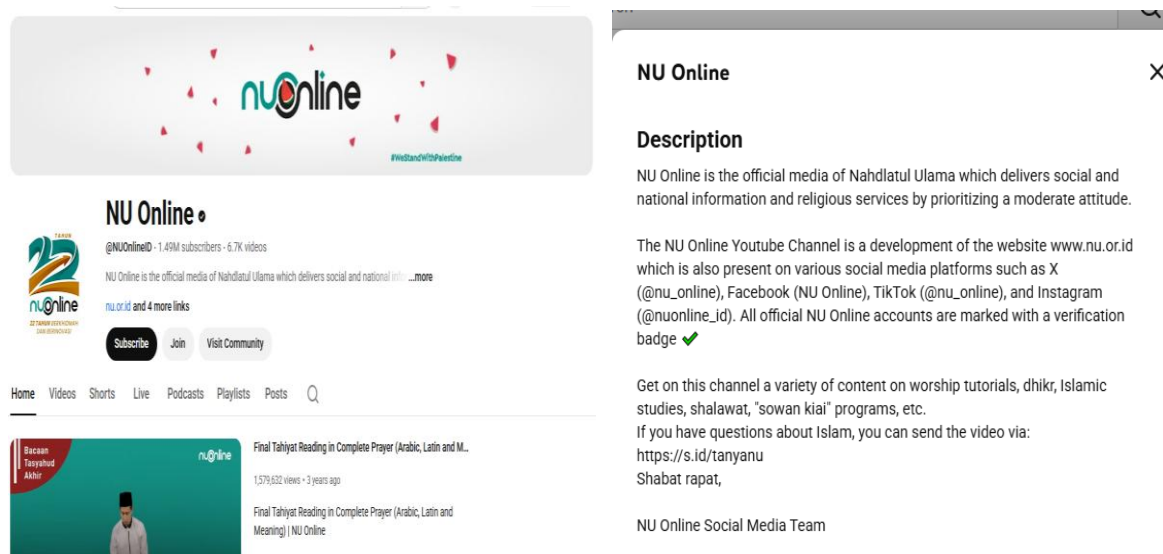
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

These results explain how the digital da'wah method applied to the NU Online YouTube channel creates a sense of closeness or hyper-personality through language, visuals, and audience interaction. The results are derived from an analysis of ten da'wah videos uploaded from January to September 2025. Transcription, theme grouping, visual coding, and audience feedback analysis have been conducted on all data presented. This section does not include theoretical interpretations or critical discussions but only provides explanations of the data and its patterns.

### **Overview of the NU Online YouTube channel**

The @NUOnlineID channel is the official platform of Nahdlatul Ulama, which is active in the online da'wah ecosystem. NU Online has 1.49 million subscribers and has uploaded 6,700 videos, according to channel view data as shown in Figure 1. These figures indicate a very high intensity of content production and a wide audience. The NU Online YouTube channel is not merely a medium for information but also a place to spread da'wah, religious education, and socio-national discussions based on the values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah an-Nahdliyah*.

The large number of posts and videos shows that NU Online is a center for digital da'wah where religious knowledge is built, NU's identity is represented, and moderate da'wah practices are disseminated to the general public. The style of narration, visual elements, and variety of themes are very important in building closeness and credibility of the channel in the eyes of the digital audience. This channel displays a consistent pattern of content production, providing a basis for analysing digital media and space in terms of message construction. This analysis is carried out using a critical constructivism framework.



**Figure 1. YouTube channel NU Online**  
**Source: NU Online’s YouTube**

A wide range of educational materials can be found on this channel, including instructions on worship, *dhikr*, Islamic studies, *salawat* recitation, the “*sowan kiai*” program, and more. This variety of content shows that the da’wah presented covers all aspects, including rituals, morals, social issues, and the religious culture of the Nahdliyin community. Additionally, this channel features the “*Ask NU*” section, an interactive service that allows users to submit video questions on Islamic issues and receive explanations from the NU Online team.

The NU Online channel offers many services and content, and it serves not only as a medium for preaching. It also serves as a center for digital religious literacy, connecting NU religious authorities with the needs of the people in the modern era. This aligns with the closing slogan, “*Sahabat rapat*,” which embodies a spirit of collectivity, closeness, and togetherness to foster a moderate and civilized preaching environment.

**Characteristics of the videos analysed**

This section presents a list of 10 preaching videos that served as the main samples in the study, as shown in Table 1. All videos were taken from the NU Online YouTube channel and were selected based on their relevance to the theme of digital preaching, the use of a personal communicative style, and the level of audience engagement. This list serves as a descriptive basis to show the context of the data analysed before being further presented in the visual, linguistic, and interactional findings in the following subsections.

Purposive sampling was used to choose these ten videos. The videos were selected because they featured religious instruction or Islamic sermons, used direct, intimate

communication, and clearly engaged the audience through views, likes, and comments. A more thorough analysis of hyper-personal communication patterns in NU Online's digital da'wah content is made possible by the chosen videos' diversity in themes, preacher traits, and communication strategies.

**Table 1. List of 10 NU Online da'wah videos analysed**

No	Video title	Upload date	Number of viewers	Content summary	Video link
1	Jika Bukan Karena Doa Ini, Manusia di Bumi Sudah Habis   Gus Baha	10/11/2025	25,966	This video explains the importance of the prayers of prophets, saints, and righteous people as guardians of the earth's blessings. Gus Baha emphasizes that these prayers are the reason humans are protected from various disasters.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/STQNq89gDic?si=JyrUzfzyZe_JkQb1">https://youtube.com/shorts/STQNq89gDic?si=JyrUzfzyZe_JkQb1</a>
2	Pentingnya Sanad Keilmuan dalam Agama   Gus Faiz	16/10/2025	342,199	Gus Faiz emphasized that the chain of transmission is a chain of authority that preserves the purity of Islamic teachings. Without this chain, knowledge can easily be misunderstood and spread incorrectly.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/fXBoMXeVyYU?si=oi7nRE8aUx_uFddd">https://youtube.com/shorts/fXBoMXeVyYU?si=oi7nRE8aUx_uFddd</a>
3	Wejangan Keras Ning Sheila Hasina untuk Santri Putri Soal Medsos	31/10/2025	22,599	Ning Sheila gave a stern warning to students to use social media wisely. She emphasized manners, caution, and not using social media as a place to display things that demean one's dignity.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/JURV1SBipjU?si=QG-3d7vCIM1EtT0k">https://youtube.com/shorts/JURV1SBipjU?si=QG-3d7vCIM1EtT0k</a>
4	Satu Hal yang Lebih Penting dari Ilmu, Kekayaan, dan Jabatan   Gus Faiz	22/10/2025	46,656	Gus Faiz said that morals are more important than knowledge and position. Morals are the basis for the acceptance of knowledge and the true identity of a Muslim.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/KS5k2MsVePg?si=W4geukP2hE9piUQd">https://youtube.com/shorts/KS5k2MsVePg?si=W4geukP2hE9piUQd</a>

5	Untukmu yang Bingung 'Nanti Jadi Apa', Dengarkan Pesan Penting Ini   Gus Faiz	09/10/2025	29,206	A motivational message for young people who are anxious about the future. Gus Faiz reassures them that confusion is a process, and Allah will guide anyone who continues to learn and improve themselves.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/u1EsRXhR6WA?si=D-P62yXs11WBsxKW">https://youtube.com/shorts/u1EsRXhR6WA?si=D-P62yXs11WBsxKW</a>
6	Jangan Karang Tasbih Sendiri!   Gus Baha	07/10/2025	231,271	Gus Baha emphasized that the practice of zikr must follow the guidance of scholars and cannot be changed or invented on one's own. Worship has rules and regulations that must be observed.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/fLn48uO8D00?si=3e-I7m6tCZgCZhK-">https://youtube.com/shorts/fLn48uO8D00?si=3e-I7m6tCZgCZhK-</a>
7	Santri Harus Bisa Berdakwah di Zaman dan Peradaban Apapun   Habib Ja'far	02/10/2025	3,525	Habib Ja'far encourages students to be adaptive in their preaching. They must be able to preach in various eras, including the digital age, without abandoning the scientific values of Islamic boarding schools.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/b6ecUCRPP4o?si=G8MQaa_a7LJCcNgw">https://youtube.com/shorts/b6ecUCRPP4o?si=G8MQaa_a7LJCcNgw</a>
8	Konsep Makan Gunakan Tangan Menurut Imam Al-Ghazali   KH Zulfa Mustofa	29/09/2025	77,470	KH Zulfa explained the etiquette of eating with one's hands based on Imam Al-Ghazali's explanation. He conveyed the spiritual and health benefits of this sunnah.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/BP1rJKwzzGk?si=gpYAEkXvqIUrn10">https://youtube.com/shorts/BP1rJKwzzGk?si=gpYAEkXvqIUrn10</a>
9	Makna Panggilan "Gus" yang sebenarnya   KH Zulfa Mustofa	13/11/2025	21,317	This video explains the meaning of the title "Gus" as a moral mandate that should not be used carelessly. The title signifies ethical responsibility for the recipient.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/fmqsjLKUgF0?si=Tvk1N5eXfsf2-m6N">https://youtube.com/shorts/fmqsjLKUgF0?si=Tvk1N5eXfsf2-m6N</a>
10	Gus Baha: Meneladani Nabi Itu yang Gampang Gampang Saja	09/11/2025	11,853	Gus Baha explained that emulating the Prophet does not have to be difficult; it is enough to start with simple morals, honesty, and everyday kindness. The Prophet's example is easy to practice consistently.	<a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/0IR6_D5grXQ?si=hdWR_cNF3_IgB_Fa">https://youtube.com/shorts/0IR6_D5grXQ?si=hdWR_cNF3_IgB_Fa</a>

Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025

### **Visual, linguistic, and interactional patterns in preaching videos**

The results of a thorough examination of all 10 of the chosen NU Online YouTube videos are shown in this section. The visual, verbal, and interactional components of hyper-personalization in digital da'wah were the main focus of the analysis. To find recurrent trends throughout the collection, each video was methodically analysed using narrative transcription, visual coding, and audience comment analysis.

Framing strategies, camera angles, lighting, backdrop settings, movements, face expressions, and on-screen textual elements were all studied in the visual analysis. The linguistic analysis concentrated on the preachers' use of rhetorical devices, tone, message structure, pronoun usage, and language style. In the meantime, the interactional analysis examined audience reactions in the comment sections, including pleas for advice, personal testimonials, expressions of emotional connection, and signs of parasocial participation.

Instead of summarizing observations from individual examples, this section highlights trends that consistently emerged across the ten videos. To provide the critical debate that follows with an empirical basis, the results are presented descriptively. Table 2 summarizes the results for each video examined.

**Table 2. Analytical findings on visual, linguistic, and interactional elements**

<b>Analysis dimension</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Findings across 10 videos</b>
<b>Visual</b>	Framing, background, gesture, on-screen text	lighting, 8 of 10 videos used close-up framing; simple backgrounds; stable lighting; emphasis on facial expressions
<b>Linguistic</b>	Pronouns, tone, rhetorical style, message structure	Conversational language; direct address; single-theme messages; advice-oriented closing
<b>Interactional (Audience comments)</b>	Comment patterns, emotional responses, and audience engagement.	Personal testimonies, gratitude, requests for guidance, parasocial engagement

A recurring pattern emerged from the visual examination of the chosen videos. The majority of videos used close-up framing, straightforward backgrounds, and steady lighting to make the preacher's face the main visual. While reducing potential distractions from the surrounding environment, this visual arrangement focused the audience's attention on gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. Additionally, several videos included on-screen text to emphasize key religious lessons, making the material easier to understand in the brief video format. The length of the examined videos, which typically

ranged from 30 to 60 seconds and concentrated on a single main idea, reflected the communication style frequently seen in modern digital preaching content.

Linguistically speaking, the videos mostly used audience-oriented and conversational language. To foster a sense of direct interaction with viewers, personal pronouns such as "*sampeyan*," "*panjenengan*," "*njenengan*," "*kamu*," and "*kita*" were often used. Usually, the messages were given in clear, understandable language and centered around a single core idea. While openers frequently began with questions, invitations, or comments meant to grab viewers' attention and entice them to keep watching, the majority of films ended with counsel, moral reflection, or brief prayers.

The interactional research showed that statements of gratitude to the preacher, personal testimonials, and emotional reactions were indicative of crowd participation. Many viewers connected the material to their own experiences, especially when it came to moral quandaries, personal growth, religious practice, and life obstacles. Comments often expressed a sense of affinity for the preacher and admiration for the message's applicability. These trends were observed across all the examined videos and show that audience participation extends beyond mere consumption.

## Discussion

### Hyper-personal construction in NU Online da'wah

The results of the study show that the hyper-personal connection in NU Online da'wah videos is the result of systematic communication design rather than chance. Walther developed the theory of hyper-personal communication, which explains that mediated communication allows the sender to present an ideal self-image, resulting in greater emotional attachment, and to control the message more selectively than in face-to-face interactions (Walther, 1996). The visual intimacy created by stable lighting, minimalist backgrounds, and close-up angles of the face increases the psychological distance between the preacher and the audience on NU Online. Although communication is one-way, this strategy makes the preacher appear personal.

Visually, distinctive production aesthetics, such as stable lighting, simple backgrounds, and close-up framing of the *dai's* face, form a hyper-personal construction. This aligns with research of Rohmatulloh et al., (2022) as well as Syaf & Ibrahim (2023) that the combination of visual elements creates an illusion of physical closeness, where the psychological distance between the *da'i* and the audience seems to disappear, even though communication is one-way. When image management is done strategically, the online approach can surpass face-to-face communication, according to Walther.

Linguistically, the use of informal language, concise sentences, and strong personal pronouns, such as "*sampeyan*," "*panjenengan*," or "*kita*," creates the impression

that the message is addressed to the individual. Preachers, such as Gus Baha, make the audience feel more emotionally close by using a combination of formal and informal language, a relaxed speaking style, and facial expressions and hand gestures that support the message (Syaf & Ibrahim, 2023). The audience feels addressed as individual subjects rather than an anonymous mass; this choice of language enhances the construction of closeness (Baym, 2015). This conversational style is beneficial in digital da'wah communication because it helps the audience feel emotionally understood, thereby enhancing the spiritual relationship.

Audience comments, such as *"this fits my current situation perfectly,"* show that they interpret the message as a direct answer to their own questions. This shows a level of interaction where the audience responds to the video as if they were talking directly to the preacher. According to Vandebosch et al. (2022), audiences often feel emotionally close to digital communicators even when there is no two-way interaction. This closeness is reinforced on NU Online by the relaxed tone of NU preachers, who do not lecture but guide, a characteristic that has long been part of the da'wah tradition of *Ahlussunnah wa al-Jama'ah*.

Comments and interactions on the NU Online YouTube channel create an illusion of closeness, allowing audiences to respond and engage directly, even though communication is still dominated by *da'i*. This aligns with the research by Novriyanto et al., (2024) and Murodi et al., (2023). When the three components (visual, linguistic, and interactional) work together, they create a hyper-personal experience that makes NU Online a source of religious information and a warm, guiding spiritual friend. This is a planned digital communication strategy that uses visuals, rhetoric, and interactivity to foster emotional closeness and audience loyalty, and to strengthen NU's position in the digital da'wah realm, resulting in a hyper-personal structure for NU Online's da'wah.

### **Critical analysis with the critical constructivism paradigm**

According to critical constructivism, social reality is constantly created by institutions, communication, cultural practices, and power dynamics rather than being an objective, fixed state (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical constructivism highlights how ideology, media systems, and social power shape specific versions of reality, in contrast to conventional constructivism, which mainly concentrates on how individuals create meaning. According to this viewpoint, communication serves as a vehicle for creating and maintaining authority, identity, values, and social relationships, as well as conveying information.

Critical constructivism in digital media presupposes that platforms actively shape reality through technological features, visual representations, communication styles, and

algorithmic systems, rather than merely reflecting it. To investigate how NU Online's YouTube content creates religious authority, emotional intimacy, and audience perceptions through audiovisual techniques, linguistic choices, and interactional patterns, this study employs critical constructivism. The approach focuses on how particular meanings and social connections are created through digital mediation, as well as the messages conveyed.

The way digital preaching content creates specific representations of religious authority and audience interactions in the context of NU Online demonstrates the tenets of critical constructivism. Close-up framing, straightforward backgrounds, and steady lighting are examples of visual consistency present in all the examined videos and serve purposes beyond being mere technical production decisions. Instead, the *da'i* is portrayed as a composed, reliable, and morally authoritative figure through these visual components. In a digital setting, audiences are encouraged to view the preacher as a trustworthy source of religious counsel through recurring visual and communication patterns.

In addition, digital media controls how religious authorities are portrayed in the algorithmic ecosystem. According to Couldry & Hepp (2017), digital media produces "deep mediatization," in which religious institutions must adjust their performativity to the logic of the platform. It seems that NU Online is aware of this: short (1–2 minute) *da'wah* content, centered on one core lesson, and easily cut into short clips, which suits YouTube's algorithm preferences. This shows that digital *da'wah* not only adheres to religious norms but also engages with the platform's technological architecture (Salam-Salmaoui et al., 2024).

This strategy also reveals a new power relationship. *Da'i* has become an authority figure who is always within reach of his followers in the digital space. Emotional closeness can increase NU's moral authority, but it can also make the audience dependent on digital figures. This aligns with the criticism of "mediated religion" (Hjarvard, 2016) which holds that religious practices are influenced by the logic of the media rather than the other way around.

This study, drawing on the critical constructivist perspective, finds that NU Online not only extends its preaching into the digital space but also shapes how people understand authority, closeness, and morality through well-designed audiovisual constructions. The dynamics of power responsible for meaning-making are also revealed in the critical constructivist structure. NU Online conveys religious messages and reinforces the organization-based religious authority structure through visual and narrative consistency. By placing certain preachers as main characters, believers perceive that these actors and the institutions that support them have religious authority.

Although social media provides space for comments and interaction, audiences tend to internalize their roles as recipients rather than producers of meaning (Fuchs, 2017).

This paradigm, however, has limitations. Media construction analysis can get caught up in extreme relativism, as if all reality is the result of subjective construction. Balancing digital representation and empirical facts is also a problem because media content often simplifies the complexity of social life to fit the visual format and short duration required by algorithms (Pamungkas et al., 2024).

Overall, in analysing NU Online, critical constructivism is relevant because it helps explain how digital media actively shape social reality, religious identity, and authority structures. In the digital age, NU Online functions as an actor in the construction of meaning by using language, symbols, visuals, and algorithmic mediation. This critical approach emphasizes that digital da'wah not only provides information but also shapes people's thinking about social and religious matters.

### **Consistency with Islamic communication values**

This study shows how NU Online's digital da'wah practices contribute to the growth of Islamic communication in modern digital contexts and demonstrate conformity with accepted Islamic communication standards. The results imply that Islamic communication is no longer restricted to using moral language only to convey religious teachings. Rather, digital platforms enable the integration of emotional connection, audiovisual representation, and ethical communication into a cohesive strategy.

The emergence of what could be called "ethical hyper-personal communication," in which emotional intimacy between the *da'i* and audiences is created through visual presentation, conversational language, and audience interaction, while remaining rooted in Islamic communication ethics, is a notable contribution of this study. NU Online blends interpersonal closeness with institutional religious authority, scientific *sanad*, and moral responsibility, in contrast to many forms of digital communication that place a higher priority on popularity or personal branding. By demonstrating that religious authority in digital settings can be reinforced not just through message content but also through ethically guided communication practices that promote trust, engagement, and spiritual connection, this result expands on current Islamic communication ideas.

Additionally, the transmission of religious teachings continues to demonstrate the practice of *dakwah bil hikmah*. Preachers typically use introspective narratives, helpful guidance, and persuasive communication to promote understanding and self-improvement rather than judgment or conflict (Sikumbang et al., 2023). This illustrates

how traditional Islamic communication principles still function in modern digital communication environments while also changing to satisfy online audiences.

From a visual perspective, findings on the NU Online YouTube channel show that calm facial expressions and gestures that are not overly expressive help create a mood that is conducive to receiving messages. This aligns with the communication standards of Islamic boarding school scholars, who emphasize exemplary behavior rather than performative rhetoric. Visual calmness is a form of etiquette in advising the people (*adab al-da'wah*), even in the tradition of Islamic communication *fiqh*. The language used by preachers, both verbally and nonverbally (such as relaxed facial expressions and calm body gestures), aligns with research (Fitriani et al., 2023), which is very important for fostering a positive mood when receiving messages. Research on non-verbal communication in da'wah emphasizes the importance of facial expressions, eye contact, and relaxed body gestures as a form of *adab al-da'wah*, which mimics the tradition of Islamic boarding school scholars and reinforces moral messages (Noor et al., 2024;Febriyanti & Holilah, 2025).

However, it should be noted that an overly individualistic approach can lead to "figure-centered authority" if it is not balanced with an emphasis on sources of knowledge (scriptures, *sanad*, and institutions). This is rarely the case at NU Online because preachers often cite classical scholars and scientific scholars. Therefore, a hyper-personal approach enhances the collective authority of the institution, not just individual branding. Digital da'wah that uses a pseudo-approach remains in line with the principles of Islamic communication, both linguistically and visually. This approach emphasizes morality, manners, and wisdom, and adapts to the digital environment while maintaining Islam's basic values.

### **Implications of digital da'wah**

The results of the study show that emotional closeness is not only the result of digital communication; it has also served as a strategy for building spiritual relationships. NU Online can give the impression of a close, non-preachy religious presence through its gentle tone, use of personal greetings, and humanistic framing of messages. This closeness is the result of symbolic construction produced through consistent narrative, visual, and delivery style choices, according to the critical constructivist perspective. This shows that moderate da'wah requires an approach that is not only informative but also effective in order to compete amid a flood of popular content that emphasizes sensation and entertainment.

The results of this study show that digital algorithms have played a structural role in the process of da'wah. Algorithms are no longer merely a medium; they now determine

audience perspective, relevance, and acceptance. With concise content, direct headlines, simple visual displays, and a single message, NU Online has adapted to algorithmic logic. This adaptation demonstrates that understanding platform governance is crucial for effective da'wah in the digital age. Therefore, da'wah institutions must develop algorithmic literacy skills so they can optimize the reach of their da'wah while avoiding dependence on biased platform mechanisms.

Additional implications relate to how the figure of the *da'i* has changed in the digital space. The *da'i* is no longer considered solely a source of religious authority but also a "spiritual friend" who accompanies the audience in their daily lives. This phenomenon shows that authority is shifting from institutional to relational. However, this approach risks excessive personification, in which Dai's popularity overshadows the meaning of religious teachings. As a result, digital da'wah ethics must balance personal closeness with the boundaries of religious professionalism so that religious authority can rely on scientific principles rather than just personal opinions in the media.

Finally, the results show that the hyper-personal approach can serve as a relevant model of da'wah for young people accustomed to consuming fast, personal, and emotional content. Through short stories, an emphasis on everyday religious experiences, and warm representations of da'wah, NU Online has taken advantage of this pattern. However, several challenges arise with this approach. One is how to maintain the depth of religious messages in very short content formats. Therefore, digital da'wah must develop a hyper-personal model that encourages critical, reflective, and contextual religious understanding.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that systematic communication construction using visual, linguistic, and interactional elements causes pseudo-closeness or hyper-personal relationships in NU Online's digital da'wah. The calm, authoritative characteristics of the *da'i* are created through visual techniques such as close-up framing, stable lighting, and minimalist backgrounds. The conversational style and personal pronouns linguistically reinforce the impression that the message is being delivered individually. However, the audience's emotional responses and testimonials indicate the formation of strong parasocial relationships.

According to an analysis conducted within the critical constructivist paradigm, NU Online is not only a medium for preaching; it is also an actor that shapes religious authority, emotional closeness, and moral meaning through the logic and algorithms of digital media. Preaching functions as the creation of a new reality that places preachers as official figures in virtual space.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the analysis was restricted to 10 carefully selected films from the NU Online YouTube channel, which may not accurately reflect the variety of digital da'wah content the organization produces. Second, the study did not include interviews with content creators, preachers, or audience members; instead, it mostly relied on qualitative content analysis of audiovisual materials and audience feedback. Therefore, rather than reflecting the objectives of content creators or the real experiences of audiences, the findings are based on patterns found in media material. Third, the results cannot be applied to other digital da'wah platforms that may use different audience interaction techniques, institutional structures, and communication tactics, given the focus on a specific Islamic organization.

This study found that digital da'wah should take Islamic communication ethics into account to prevent over-reliance on emotions. NU Online serves as an example of how digital media can foster emotional intimacy while upholding moral responsibility, honesty, sincerity, and institutional accountability. By examining several Islamic organizations, including audience interviews, or by investigating the long-term impacts of hyper-personal communication on religious authority, audience behavior, and religious practices in digital society, future studies may broaden the scope of analysis.

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