

Credibility and Rhetoric in Gus Iqdam's Da'wah: A TikTok Case Study

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Abstract

A high-credibility preacher is essential for gaining public trust in delivering Islamic da'wah effectively. Agus Muhammad Iqdam Kholid, widely known as Gus Iqdam, is a prominent young preacher from East Java who disseminates religious messages not only through face-to-face sermons but also via social media platforms, particularly TikTok. Digital media functions increase both a space for religious discourse and as a source of psychological support for individuals experiencing mental distress; this study examines Gus Iqdam's coping messages, the attributes that shape his credibility, and explores his preaching rhetoric alongside audience responses on secondary TikTok accounts such as @GusIqdamDaily and @MANUTSTPUSAT. By using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research explores sermon transcripts, audience comments, and supporting news content using digital documentation, netnographic observation, and Philipp Mayring's content analysis with source and technical triangulation. The findings reveal that Gus Iqdam's preaching emphasises wisdom, resilience, and hope through the message "must be enek masane." His credibility is reinforced by trustworthiness, expertise, authority, charisma, and moral integrity, while adaptive rhetoric, humour, and contextualised discussions of mental health enhance audience engagement. The study concludes that his digital da'wah functions not merely as religious entertainment but also as a psychological-religious therapeutic medium that supports emotional validation and helps mitigate anxiety among cyber society.

Keywords: Credibility, Da'wah, Rethoric.

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Introduction

Da'wah is an activity of conveying religious messages based on the Al-Qur'an and Hadith to the public with the aim of reminding people of goodness (Aziz, 2009). Da'wah can be carried out by a man or a woman and requires there to be a target for the da'wah, so that the da'wah is said to be successful if the message or material conveyed does not cause conflict or discrimination against people of different beliefs, ethnicity, race or religion and is soothing for

the Islamic community itself and can have an impact or change in society regarding goodness (Amin, 2013).

In the context of the Qur'an, precisely in (Surah Al-Anfal verse 24) da'wah is said to be a call to faith, as a light of enlightenment and protection for fellow humans. Allah's Word in Q.S Al-Anfal verse 24: "O you who believe, fulfill the call of Allah and the call of the Messenger when the Messenger calls you to something that gives you life, know that Allah has created a boundary between man and his heart and indeed it is to Him that you will be gathered. "This verse explains that da'wah is carried out to fulfill the call of Allah and His Messenger, with the aim of bringing life and reminding that religion is haqiqi, because everything will return to the afterlife (Ismail, 2013).

Da'wah can be said to be successful if there are interrelated elements of da'wah such as da'i, mad'u, da'wah material, da'wah media, da'wah methods and the effect of da'wah itself (Aminudin, 2016). One of the most important elements in da'wah is a da'i. A da'i is someone who carries out da'wah activities directly or indirectly (in writing) or through actions carried out individually, in groups or organizations. Da'i is also referred to as a person who invites goodness directly or indirectly, by acting in a better direction according to Islamic law. Therefore, a preacher when in society will be seen from his morals, attitudes and behavior because the preacher will become a role model for the community itself (Amin, 2013).

Every Muslim must have credibility, including a preacher. Credibility is expertise in a field that can be trusted. Da'i plays an important role in the success of da'wah as judged by the da'i's personality. This is reflected in the credibility of the da'i and the rhetoric used by the da'i when delivering his preaching. To have high credibility in society, an ideal preacher must have a good personality, because this will have a direct impact on the community (Arifin, 2011)

The credibility of a da'i is grouped into 8, namely communication skills, educational knowledge, psychology, the Koran and Hadith, religious knowledge, general knowledge and self-control abilities. If a preacher has these 8 criteria, then his preaching will have an effect on his mad'un (Amin, 2013). In society's view, a da'i is someone who is most reliable in religious knowledge. Therefore, so that people are not disappointed with the existence of a preacher, he must have adequate skills in religious knowledge and allied sciences.

Apart from knowledge about religion, a da'i is also seen from his personality and ability to invite people to preach or what is usually called rhetoric. Rhetoric is referred to as the art of

speaking or the ability to choose language in certain circumstances which includes monologic, dialogic and speaking techniques. Monologica is the art of speaking carried out by individuals, such as speeches, lectures and presentations. Meanwhile, dialogue is the art of speaking carried out by two or more people (dialogue). The role of communication in da'wah is very important to achieve goals so that it produces an effect on the target of da'wah. (Hawassy, 2023)

Rhetoric plays an important role for a da'i, because many da'i are unsuccessful in conveying their da'wah messages to mad'u because they are unable to choose language that is easy to reach the audience, monotonous and uninteresting. Rhetoric is different from public speaking which is interpreted as a form of combining the art of speaking with knowledge that can convince the public through a persuasive approach. So, da'wah rhetoric is the skill of a da'i in conveying his da'wah message to the public (Rokhman & Muslimah, 2021).

In conveying his preaching, a da'i must have several provisions, namely provisions that exist in his personality and provisions of knowledge that will be conveyed to his mad'u. Two things that a da'i must bring, namely credibility and the rhetoric of da'wah, determine the success of a da'i's preaching to his mad'u. Both must be interrelated with the aim of placing trust in Mad'u (Husna, 2022).

Da'wah through social media is very easily accepted by various groups, from young people to adults. The majority of them choose the internet to increase their insight, religious/general knowledge or as entertainment. Da'wah and technology are two things that are interrelated so that da'wah in this era can be easily accepted by various groups. The current development of da'wah is positive and of course there are also shortcomings for the audience. One of the social media used in preaching is YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and others to disseminate the da'wah message conveyed by the da'i (Fairuz et al., 2024).

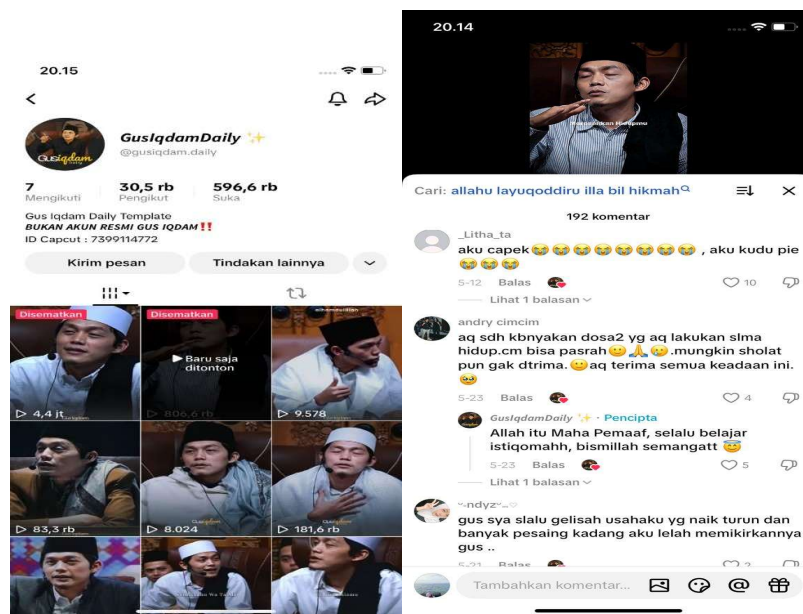
One of the preachers who will be discussed is Agus Muhammad Iqdam Kholid or commonly known as Gus Iqdam. Gus Iqdam is a young preacher who comes from Blitar, East Java Province. He is an alumni of the Al-Falah Ploso Mojo Kediri Islamic Boarding School students. He is the last of four children who were the children of the founder of the Mamba'ul Hikam II Islamic Boarding School Karang Gayam, Blitar, namely K.H Kholid Ridho and Nyai Hj. Lamatul Waridah. Gus Iqdam is one of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) preachers who is popular and known to the public, so many thousands of congregants are waiting for his arrival. Gus Iqdam has the ability to turn a prohibition into a motivation that encourages someone to change for the better. Gus Iqdam in 2021 married Aning Nilatin Nihayah, daughter of Almaghfurlah KH. Thoha Widodo Zaini Munawwir from the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School. After starting

a family, Gus Iqdam and his wife, Ning Nila, were blessed with a son named Gus Novel (Arridho & Islam, 2024).

Apart from preaching directly at the Sabilu Taubah Taklim Council, Gus Iqdam was also invited to many places in various regions and on social media. Therefore, Gus Iqdam's delivery of da'wah must be in accordance with his mad'u situation. Gus Iqdam's delivery of da'wah is very easy for various groups to understand with his characteristic accent and the ability to master religious knowledge which comes from the Al-Qur'an, Hadith and other Salafi books. This makes Mad'u have a sense of trust in him. Apart from his accent, the way he conveys his preaching is also punctuated with humor so that many mad'u are interested in his preaching (Husna, 2022).

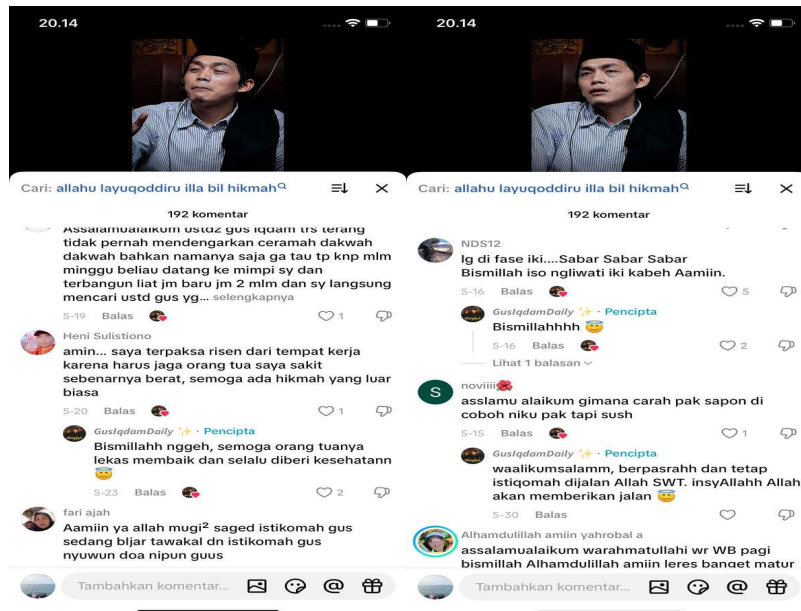
Researchers studied Gus Iqdam's preaching content on TikTok social media which was uploaded by @GusIqdamDaily. The content contains the statement “*Ketika kamu itu pengen tenang menghadapi sesuatu yang memang meresahkan hidupmu, kunci pertama adalah Allahu La yuqaddiru Illa Syai'an Illa bil Hikmah. Jenengan harus paham dibalik semua perjalanan hidup ini ketentuan Allah pasti tersimpan hikmah yang luar biasa.*”

Figure 1. Media Sosial TikTok @GusIqdamDaily



Source: Documentation, 2025

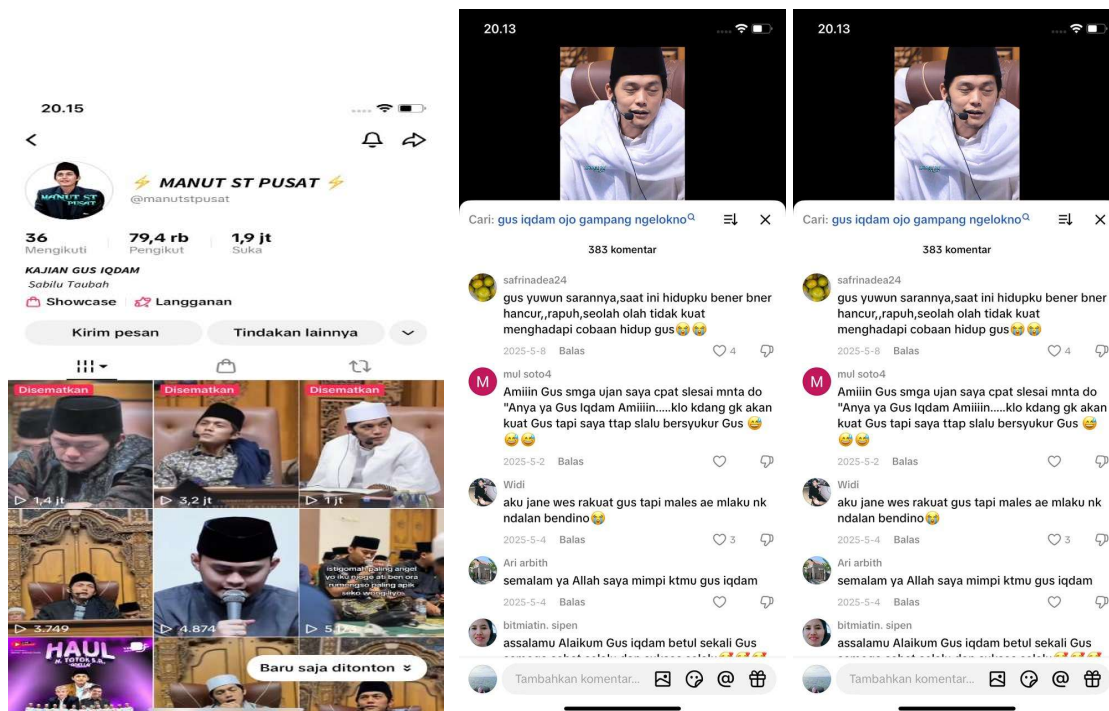
Figure 2. Interaction TikTok @GusIqdamDaily



Source: Documentation, 2025

In other content uploaded by the @MANUTSTPUSAT account Gus Iqdam dawuh “artinya ujian itu tidak mungkin selamanya dalam hidup ini mesti enek masane. Tapi uwong ki kadang yo enek sing kuat enek sing rakuat, nek sing kuat menghadapi ujian tersebut bisa jadi kemudian dia bangkit dimasa yang akan datang, ono kalane wong kui mau ya ora kuat malah dadi nemen kui yo pirang-pirang.”

Figure 3. Comments on TikTok @GusIqdamDaily



Source: Documentation, 2025

On this content, many audiences commented positively and negatively. Audiences who comment negatively feel that they have given up on life, are tired and have given up. They think that life is full of difficult trials and they are no longer strong enough to face these trials, which makes it difficult for them to accept the situation and difficult to live in peace. However, for those who commented positively, they were able to be patient so that they had calm and strength to face all of life's trials. Because life is not always filled with tests that are difficult for us to face, because Allah SWT will not test a servant unless he is able to face it.

In this data, Gus Iqdam's high credibility lies in his ability to carry out down-to-earth theological reframing. When netizens face an existential crisis (feeling weak, tired, resigned), Gus Iqdam is present not as a moral judge, but as an adaptive spiritual advisor.

1. Its credibility is proven by its ability to mobilize two polarities of response (positive and negative) into a space for religious-based mental health discourse in the comments column.
2. He is recognized for being able to link high theological doctrines "is Allahu La yuqaddiru Illa Syai'an Illa bil Hikmah." with the psychological reality of urban/digital society ("enek masane", "sing strong/ra strong").

This research uses the Philipp Mayring or Krippendorff model of Qualitative Content Analysis, which focuses on the meaning of the text:

1. Manifest Content (Written Text): Directly analyze Gus Iqdam's words regarding fate, wisdom and the duration of the exam.
2. Latent Content (Implicit Text): Analyze the meaning behind netizen comments (for example, negative comments are analyzed as a manifestation of spiritual burnout or a symptom of hopelessness).

The sample was chosen deliberately with the following criteria:

1. Gus Iqdam videos uploaded by secondary/large fandom accounts (@GusIqdamDaily and @MANUTSTPUSAT) with high engagement rates (lots of likes and comments).
2. Content that specifically discusses the theme of coping mechanisms (calm life, tests, and fate).
3. Netizen comments representing two extreme poles: groups experiencing spiritual struggle (negative/giving up) and groups experiencing spiritual growth (positive/patient).

For data validity, data source triangulation and theory triangulation were carried out:

1. Source Triangulation: Comparing Gus Iqdam's statement in the video Viewer response in the comments column Doctrine of the yellow book (Islamic classical text) about patience and wisdom.
2. Triangulation Theory: Analyzing the phenomenon of netizen responses using the analysis of communication sociology (Credibility Theory) as well as religious psychology (religious coping concept).

The phenomenological approach is very appropriate to use because this research aims to understand the lived experience of the audience. Phenomenology entered when researchers uncovered why netizens made negative comments (they experienced the phenomenon of acute resignation and found life difficult to be calm) and how Gus Iqdam's *dawuh* was interpreted as a "new awareness" for netizens who commented positively in order to survive.

Literature Review

A. Credibility

Credibility is another person's point of view regarding the communicator's character, expertise, confidence in receiving the messages conveyed. Credibility can have a positive impact on an organization. Credibility is the level of trust a communicant has in the communicator, where a communicator can provide confidence in the communicant. Communicators in *da'wah* are called preachers or *da'i* (Ashfiah, 2019). The credibility of a *da'i* will have an impact on the audience if the *da'wah* messages conveyed are effective, trustworthy and have a clear source (Fitria et al., 2020).

Something that is credible can influence a person's level of trust. This relates to a credible preacher who can easily gain the trust of the public. According to Sweeney & Swait, credibility has two independent variables, namely trust and expertise (Sweeney & Swait, 2008). The trust associated with a *da'i* is the honesty and willingness of a *da'i* to be able to fulfill the messages conveyed to the *mad'u* in accordance with the sources of the Al-Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah. The credibility of a *da'i*'s expertise is the abilities possessed by the *da'i* such as scientific abilities, religious knowledge, emotional control, dialogue skills and so on. Apart from that, Haley shows that credibility has four elements, namely, honesty, ethics, expertise, beliefs and morals (Haley, 1996). Thus, credibility can be concluded as a communicator's trust in the communicator based on the personality traits, skills, and morals of a communicator so that it can have a good effect on the audience (Hariyanto, 2020).

B. Rethoric

The rhetoric of da'wah is the art and skill of conveying da'wah messages (Islamic teachings) orally and in writing in an effective, persuasive, clear and heart-touching way, so as to influence the understanding, attitudes and behavior of the mad'u (audience) in accordance with Islamic values. In simple terms, da'wah rhetoric is a way of speaking in preaching so that religious messages are easily understood, accepted and put into practice. Elements in preaching rhetoric: (Tohir, 2021)

1. Da'i (communicator) is the person who conveys the message.
2. Mad'u (audience) is the person who receives the da'wah.
3. Da'wah material, namely the content of the message (aqidah, sharia, morals).
4. Delivery method, namely the method or communication strategy.
5. Media, namely the means used (pulpit, social media, etc.).

The rhetorical concept of da'wah is based on the Al-Qur'an, for example in Surah An-Nahl verse 125 which emphasizes Bil hikmah (with wisdom), Mau'izhah hasanah (good advice) and Mujjadi billati hiya ahsan (dialogue in the best way). So, da'wah rhetoric is not just clever speaking, but also includes ethics, strategy, understanding the psychology of the audience, and sincerity in conveying the truth (AS, 2014).

Research Methods

The approach in this research uses a phenomenological approach. According to Schurtz, the phenomenological approach is the study of knowledge that comes from awareness of the way we understand an object or event. Researchers use a phenomenological approach because it relates to the selected object. Researchers want to study the phenomenon of the credibility and rhetoric of Gus Iqdam's preaching. This type of research is qualitative research. Qualitative research is research that will reveal a truth naturally by collecting various descriptive data. The subject of this research is Gus Iqdam, while the object of this research is Gus Iqdam's preaching on social media Tiktok which is contained in the @Sabilu_Taubah Official account (Mulyana, 2008).

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of analysis of preaching content on the TikTok account @Sabilu_Taubah Official, netizen comments, and other supporting sources, several research findings were obtained as follows:

Analysis of The Coping Message in Gus Iqdam's da'wah

This study identified two main messages, namely the phrases "*Allahu la yuqaddiru illa syai'an illa bil hikmah*" and "*mesti enek masane*", without describing the psychological or spiritual processes that make the two messages able to help the audience cope with the pressures of life. In fact, based on *the theory of religious coping* developed by Pargament, religious coping strategies not only invite individuals to be patient, but also help individuals reinterpret negative experiences through the belief that every event is in God's will and contains wisdom. In this context, Gus Iqdam's message actually shows a form of *positive religious coping*, which is changing the audience's perception from viewing exams as suffering to part of the spiritual learning process. The phrase "*must be enek masane*" also provides a dimension of hope (*temporal hope*), which is the belief that every difficulty has a time limit so that individuals are encouraged to survive.

The Attributes that Form the Credibility of Gus Iqdam

Gus Iqdam (Agus Muhammad Iqdam Kholid) shows a strong element of credibility in conveying da'wah, including:

a. Trustworthiness (Trust)

The preaching material delivered always refers to the Al-Qur'an, Hadith, and classical books that he mastered. This increased Mad'u's level of confidence in the content of his lecture. Grows because of message consistency. Gus Iqdam is trusted because he does not promise that the test will disappear instantly, but rather gives theological certainty that "*must be enek masane*" (there will be a time when the test ends). The honesty of this reality builds audience trust.

b. Expertise (Expertise)

Islamic boarding school educational background and mastery of religious knowledge are the main factors that strengthen his ability to answer religious questions contextually. Demonstrated through fluency in quoting the theological principle "*Allahu La Yuqaddiru.....*" Mastery of this religious instrument provides scientific-religious legitimacy that the concept of tranquility that he offers has a valid Islamic legal basis.

c. Authority (Authority)

As an administrator of the Sabilu Taubah Taklim Council and part of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) environment, he has social and religious legitimacy that is recognized by the community. Rooted in his background as a caretaker at the Mambaul Hikam II Islamic

Boarding School. On social media, this traditional authority is transformed into digital authority, where its preaching is considered a soothing fatwa for netizens who are mentally "sick".

d. Charisma (Charisma)

His delivery style is relaxed, communicative and full of humor, so that it is easily accepted by various groups, especially the younger generation. It radiates from his calm but firm demeanor. The choice of diction that does not judge people who are "ra strong" (not strong) makes their personal appeal magical, able to touch the deepest emotional side of the TikTok audience.

e. Morality (Akhlaq)

A humble attitude, non-judgmental language, and persuasive approach demonstrate good moral integrity as a preacher. Reflected by the empathetic attitude in the narrative. He did not criticize people who failed the exam ("kui yo blondes" / there are a lot of them). This shows the morals of preaching that are embracing (tathbiqul akhlak), not hitting. Gus Iqdam's Da'wah Rhetoric.

Meanwhile, the dimensions *of authority, charisma, and morality* actually strengthen each other in building *parasocial trust*, which is trust formed through indirect interaction on social media. Thus, Gus Iqdam's credibility not only comes from his scientific capacity as a scholar, but also from his ability to build emotional relationships through a simple, empathetic, and non-judgmental communication style. Such an analysis has not been seen in the article, so the discussion is still an inventory of indicators, not a scientific interpretation of how credibility is formed and affects the effectiveness of digital da'wah.

Exploration of The Rhetoric of Da'wah and Audience Responses on TikTok

In the rhetorical aspect, several effective communication strategies were found:

a. Use of Local Language

The use of Javanese with a distinctive dialect is its own attraction. This creates emotional closeness with the audience. Gus Iqdam uses Code-Mixing and Code-Switching strategies between formal Arabic, Javanese (fine & rough), and Indonesian. When speaking of basic principles, he uses Arabic: Allahu La yuqaddiru... to lock in theological authority. When making an emotional approach, he switches to Javanese: "Jenengan must understand" (persuasive-respectful) and "uwong ki sometimes yo enek

sing strong enek sing raquat" (descriptive-realistic). This local Javanese language collapses the sociological distance between ulama and ordinary netizens.

b. Humor as a Persuasive Medium

The inclusion of humor makes the atmosphere of the preaching less tense and easier to understand. Even though the two quotes above discuss heavy themes (depression, resignation, life's trials), Gus Iqdam's performances on TikTok usually mitigate this tension with polite satirical humor. Phrases like "instead dadi nemen kui yo blonde-blonde" are delivered with a distinctive, tickling intonation. Humor functions as a shock absorber so that audiences who are stressed do not feel like they are being lectured to, but rather are being laughed at along with the reality in a humorous way.

c. Contextual and Relevant

The material presented is often related to the daily life problems of young people, such as relationships, migration and repentance. Gus Iqdam is very contextual with the post-truth era and digital mental health:

He validates the audience's fragile feelings. When netizens commented negatively because they were tired, Gus Iqdam's rhetoric in the second content actually confirmed that "pancen enek sing ra strong" (there are indeed those who are not strong).

The contextualization lies in the promise of hope: for the strong to "rise in the future", and the reminder that the test "must be enek masane" (there must be an expiration date). This is very relevant to the jargon of today's young people who need emotional validation as well as spiritual solutions.

d. Social Media as a Modern Da'wah Means

The use of TikTok as a da'wah medium shows adaptation to developments in digital technology, so that da'wah messages can reach a wider audience. Phenomenologically, positive responses from netizens in the form of comments, number of viewers and interactions show that Gus Iqdam's credibility and rhetoric contribute to the effectiveness of his preaching.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that Gus Iqdam has high credibility as a preacher, which is demonstrated through aspects of trust, expertise, authority, charisma and morality. The preaching rhetoric used is effective because it combines easy-to-understand language, a humorous approach, relevance to the social context, and optimal use of social media. The combination of credibility and preaching rhetoric is the main factor in the success

of Gus Iqdam's preaching in attracting attention and building trust in mad'u, especially the younger generation. Da'wah through social media has been proven to be able to expand the reach of religious messages more quickly and interactively. Based on an analysis of Gus Iqdam's preaching content on the TikTok accounts @GusIqdamDaily and @MANUTSTPUSAT as well as audience responses in the comments column, several main points can be concluded as follows:

1. The essence of the Da'wah message: Gus Iqdam offers the concept of a religious coping mechanism which is centered on the theology of wisdom (Allahu La yuqaddiru Illa Syai'an Illa bil Hikmah) and the certainty of the exam timeline ("must be enek masane"). This message functions as spiritual comfort amidst the high anxiety of modern/digital society.
2. Figure Credibility: Gus Iqdam's high credibility on social media is firmly supported by the integration of five important dimensions: trust (honest/realistic messages), expertise (mastery of religious instruments/books), authority (Islamic boarding school background), charisma (down-to-earth magical character), and akhlak (an embracing and non-judgmental approach).
3. Effective Da'wah Rhetoric: The success of Gus Iqdam's message on TikTok lies in an adaptive communication strategy through a linguistic approach (mixing Arabic-Javanese code to break down sociological distance), humor (as a reducer of the audience's psychological tension), and contextualization which is very relevant to mental health issues (validating young people's emotions).
4. Dynamics of Audience Reception (Phenomenology): The TikTok comment space represents a discourse space that is split into two poles:

Positive Group explains Experienced spiritual growth, where dawuh Gus Iqdam succeeded in providing strength, patience and calm to face trials. Negative Group explains Experiencing spiritual struggle (spiritual exhaustion/acute resignation). However, the presence of Gus Iqdam's content is actually important as a space for validation that "feeling not strong" is a human thing, as well as providing new hope to rise in the future.

Through qualitative methodology, content analysis, and a phenomenological approach, this research proves that Gus Iqdam's digital preaching is not just an entertainment spectacle, but has been transformed into an effective psychological-religious therapy instrument for cyber society.

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