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## Young ulema and da'wah in the digital era: weighing credibility amidst popularity

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**Abstract.** The development of social media in the digital era has changed the face of da'wah, especially through platforms such as TikTok, which is now popular among young preachers to convey religious teachings. But this phenomenon also presents a new challenge, where the credibility of an ustadz is not always measured by deep understanding or clear scientific sanad, but rather by visual appeal and popularity on social media. Many young people find it easier to trust figures who appear charismatic and Islamic-looking without considering the validity of their knowledge, so there are various opinions regarding the validity of da'wah today. This study aims to explain the extent to which the credibility of young preachers in the digital era can be accounted for, as well as how their popularity affects people's perceptions of the religious knowledge they convey. Using qualitative research methods, this study explores the understanding and perspectives of young ustadz and the public through in-depth interviews, observation of da'wah content, and group discussions. The findings of this study show that it is important for da'wah content creators to take wise action in choosing the material delivered, by considering the accuracy and depth of da'wah knowledge so that it remains based on a valid sanadic tradition. This is an effort to maintain the purity of da'wah in the midst of the swift flow of information on social media.

**Keywords:** Young ulema, digital da'wah, religious credibility

## INTRODUCTION

Everyone who practices something will be held accountable, including in the matter of the knowledge they convey and practice. This illustrates that on the Day of Judgment, every individual will be held accountable for what they practiced and where it came from. The hadith narrated by Abu Abdurrahman al-Marwazi and transmitted by Abdullah b. al-Mubarak emphasizes the importance of "al-atsar," which is the chain of transmission in knowledge. In the conversation, it is explained that on the Day of Judgment, a person will be asked from whom they practiced a certain knowledge. For example, if someone mentions the name of their teacher, that teacher will also be presented before Allah, and this process continues up to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Thus, the sanad becomes a network that connects a student with their teacher, ultimately reaching the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This emphasizes the importance of having a clear sanad in acquiring knowledge, as that will be the accountability before Allah.

Regarding the preaching of young scholars in the digital era, challenges arise when a relaxed and casual delivery style is prioritized over the emphasis on the depth of knowledge that should have a valid chain of transmission (sanad). Young preachers active on social media often use platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok to reach a wider audience. A light and engaging delivery style can help them build a relationship with the audience, but if it is not accompanied by authentic knowledge and a clear chain of transmission, their preaching risks losing depth and even becoming misleading.

The chain of knowledge or al-atsar in this case provides a foundation for young preachers to not only prioritize popularity but also to maintain the credibility of their preaching by ensuring that the knowledge conveyed comes from authentic sources. In digital preaching, where information spreads so easily without strict verification, young scholars must emphasize that although they use engaging delivery styles, the content of their preaching must still contain clear and accountable knowledge. This is in accordance with the teachings of Ibn Aun who stated, "Knowledge is a matter of religion, so pay attention to from whom you obtain your knowledge!"

Thus, maintaining a balance between an appealing appearance and a deep understanding of the chain of knowledge becomes important for young ustadz in the digital era. They are not only responsible for the quality of the sermons delivered, but also must ensure that the messages given have a strong foundation and can be accounted for, both in this world and in the hereafter.

## Source Credibility Theory

Source credibility theory is a theory that explains how the credibility of an information source affects the acceptance and use of messages by users. This theory was proposed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley. In this context, the source credibility theory emphasizes that the credibility of a cleric in preaching in the digital world greatly influences how the conveyed message is received by the audience. In the digital era, young preachers who are

popular on social media have wide access to spread their preaching messages. However, this popularity does not always align with credibility. The audience does not only judge scholars by how famous they are, but also by how competent, honest, and trustworthy they are in conveying religious teachings. (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

This theory separates two main elements of credibility: competence (the knowledge and expertise of the cleric) and trust. (integritas dan niat baik). In the context of young preachers in the digital era, the audience needs to assess whether they are merely famous for their charisma and communication skills, or truly competent in religious knowledge. This theory is relevant in assessing whether the audience will receive the da'wah message in its entirety or with skepticism when the credibility of the scholar is questioned.

In the era of social media, viral content policies can encourage young preachers to focus more on popularity than on the depth and quality of their message. This can create a gap between scholars who aim to preach sincerely and those who prioritize social influence. Therefore, the source credibility theory helps us understand the importance of credibility over popularity in maintaining the essence of da'wah, which is oriented towards the dissemination of authentic and trustworthy religious teachings.

### **Jean Baudrillard and Media Semiotics**

Jean Baudrillard, a French thinker, proposed the view that signs have detached from the objects they represent, until eventually, the media creates a world where nothing is truly real. (Suyanto et al., 2023). Initially, signs functioned as simple representations of an object or situation, with a clear relationship to what they represented. Baudrillard refers to this stage as the symbolic order, which is commonly found in feudal societies, where meaning is still closely tied to the actual object.

The second stage, which he calls counterfeits, developed from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. At this stage, signs begin to have a looser relationship with the actual objects. That means, signs begin to form new meanings that are not directly rooted in the original object or experience. For example, status, wealth, and reputation began to be measured based on material signs such as clothing or houses, even though these things are not naturally related to the aspects they signify. (Asharudin, 2023).

During the Industrial Revolution, a stage emerged that Baudrillard referred to as production. (production). In this era, technology and machines were created to replace human labor, making objects increasingly distant from their original meaning or use. Machines began to operate without relying on human understanding of the processes within them; when a button is pressed, the machine produces a certain form without considering the meaning behind the object it creates. (Rantung, 2024).

In the current era, Baudrillard named this stage as simulation, where signs no longer merely represent reality, but begin to create reality itself. Simulation governs who we are and what we do, directing us to live in an artificial reality constructed by signs. Instead of using representations to understand the world, we now live in a reality shaped by signs. Machines no longer merely operate based on human commands, but rather on programs created by the symbolic culture around us. (Paramita et al., 2024).

Jean Baudrillard's view on simulation is highly relevant when linked to the phenomenon of preaching through media like TikTok in the current digital era. According to Baudrillard, we live in an era of simulation where signs not only represent reality but also create reality itself. In the context of preaching on TikTok, signs, symbols, and religious messages conveyed no longer merely serve as a means to deliver religious teachings, but gradually shape the audience's perception of religious reality and spirituality in the digital world. (Naufaldhi, 2024).

### **Classic Media Theory by Marshall McLuhan**

Classic Media Theory. Marshall McLuhan is perhaps the most famous for drawing our attention to the importance of media as media. McLuhan, a prominent figure in popular culture research in the 1960s, drew attention due to his unusual writing style and his surprising and thought-provoking ideas. (Arifiana, 2023). Although the details of McLuhan's theory are often rejected in general media theory, his thesis has received widespread acceptance in the media, separate from any content conveyed, individual influence, or society. (Paramita et al., 2024).

This idea in its various forms is what we call "media theory." Television influences you regardless of what you watch. The virtual world influences society, regardless of the sites people visit. Personal media (e.g., iPod) change society, regardless of the song choices made by its users. McLuhan was not the first to write about this idea. In fact, his ideas were greatly influenced by the works of his mentor, Harold Adams Innis, who taught that communication media is the essence of civilization and that history is directed by the dominant media of its time. For McLuhan and Innis, media are extensions of the human mind, so the prominent media in use distort any historical period. Ancient heavy media such as scrolls, clay, or stone are very strong and therefore time-binding because they can last a very long time.

Marshall McLuhan's thoughts on classical media theory—where media itself influences humans and society, regardless of the specific content conveyed—can be used to analyze the role of social media like TikTok in the dissemination of religious teachings. McLuhan argued that media acts as an "extension" of the human mind, and that the dominant media of a given era influences the way society thinks and behaves during that time. Following McLuhan's idea, TikTok as a medium not only conveys religious content but also inherently influences

how that religious message is understood and received by society, regardless of the substance of the message itself. (Fatimah, 2024).

TikTok is a media platform that promotes short visual content with a focus on entertainment and audience engagement through its interactive features. As McLuhan stated, media defines the experience and interaction methods of society; on TikTok, da'wah messages are not only measured by their religious content but also by how they can attract attention, follow trends, and gather responses from users. As a fast and visual digital medium, TikTok influences the way religious messages are delivered—such as using short and easily digestible formats, engaging background music, and captivating delivery styles. This means that the nature of the TikTok medium itself shapes the audience's perception and response to the preaching, not solely because of the message or teachings conveyed. (Agustin et al., 2024).

Moreover, McLuhan and his mentor, Harold Innis, believed that the dominant media of an era would shape the character of its society. As is happening in the digital era, where social media and digital technology dominate, society becomes more attached to viral, instant, and easily consumable messages. McLuhan referred to this phenomenon as "media bias," which in the context of preaching on TikTok influences how the audience consumes and interprets religious content. For example, simple, visual messages that can provide entertainment are often more favored than complex content or that which requires deep contemplation, leading to a shallower understanding of religion focused on symbolic aspects, in accordance with Baudrillard's simulation concept. (Holilah & Fahrurrozi, 2021).

In this view, preaching on TikTok risks becoming merely a symbol or sign that follows the logic of popularity and user interaction, creating a new reality distorted by the characteristics of the medium itself. Referring to McLuhan, "the medium is the message," meaning the way religious preaching is delivered through TikTok ultimately alters the essence of the preaching itself—becoming part of social and pop culture trends controlled by algorithms and audience preferences, which may stray from the actual religious substance. (Achfandhy et al., 2023).

## METHOD

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the credibility of young religious leaders on social media, particularly on the TikTok platform, as well as their popularity's influence on public perception of preaching. This research focuses on an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of preaching that is developing in the digital era. TikTok was chosen as the object of study because this platform has become one of the popular media for young religious leaders to convey religious teachings. The case study design allows researchers to specifically observe and analyze how the credibility and popularity of young ustadz are formed on social media. (Pramuja, 2024).

The research subjects include young preachers who are actively preaching on TikTok and the audience that follows their preaching content. The sample of young preachers is purposively selected based on certain criteria, such as a significant number of followers and the frequency of preaching content uploads. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation of da'wah content on TikTok, and focused group discussions with their audience. The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive approach to explore public perceptions and examine the factors influencing the credibility of religious preaching on social media. (Pramuja et al., 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

If viewed from the characteristics of TikTok as a user-generated media, this platform offers a number of features that can be utilized by its users. One of TikTok's distinctive features is the music feature, which allows users to add various songs, both licensed and provided by the platform itself. This music can be used as a background, adding an extra dimension to the uploaded content, including for the purpose of preaching.

In the context of preaching, this music feature plays an important role because it can touch the emotional aspects (feelings/affection) of the audience and capture their attention. Music has the power to give a certain mood to the message being conveyed, just like in a film where sound or music can influence the audience's mood. For example, using religious-themed music or nature sounds as a background can strengthen the message of the da'wah being delivered, while also making the content more engaging and captivating for the audience. In addition to popular songs or EDM commonly used by many people, TikTok also offers a selection of songs with a more spiritual nuance that are highly relevant to religious content, providing an additional dimension for young preachers to convey religious messages in a more engaging way.

### Young Ustadz in the Era of Society 5.0

Young Ustadz in the era of Society 5.0 are very adaptive to technology and utilize digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as media for preaching. With an approach through interactive content such as vlogs, podcasts, and short videos, they find it easier to connect with the millennial and Gen Z generations. This format allows for a more personal form of preaching, where young ustadz not only convey religious messages but also directly respond to various questions and concerns from their followers. They uphold the values of peace, unity, and tolerance, and strive to make Islam relevant in the midst of a diverse and pluralistic society.

A moderate and inclusive attitude has become a hallmark of young ustadz. They avoid confrontational attitudes, opting for a dialogical approach full of tolerance and understanding. With this method, they emphasize the importance of unity and social justice in Islam. Young preachers also strive to reduce extremism by promoting peace and acceptance of differences, making their preaching more accepted by the younger generation who value openness and diversity. This moderate attitude presents a peaceful and friendly image of the religion, making Islam easier to understand and accept in diverse social contexts.

Moreover, young clerics are sensitive to social issues relevant in modern life. They do not only discuss religious laws or worship rituals, but also raise everyday topics such as romance, life motivation, and other social issues. By discussing these topics, young clerics demonstrate that Islam also provides guidance in facing modern life's challenges. This role makes them figures capable of providing answers to the concerns of the younger generation, and also shows that religion cares about the well-being of humans and the environment. Many young religious leaders have a background in higher education in both religious studies and general sciences, with some even pursuing studies abroad. This gives them broad insights and critical thinking skills, enabling them to convey comprehensive views. Young preachers package their sermons with views that are not only based on religion but also combined with social, political, and cultural perspectives according to the needs of the times. This ability makes their preaching more easily accepted, and helps the younger generation lead a life balanced between spirituality and materialism.

In Islamic society, scholars hold a strategic position as leaders who serve as the primary reference in religious matters. With their deep knowledge of religion, scholars serve as a place for asking questions, consulting, and sharing views in resolving religious and social issues. In addition, the role of scholars is also very important in certain situations, where they actively participate in social, political, and even state affairs. This is in line with various verses in the Qur'an that affirm the high status of a scholar in the sight of Allah, such as in Surah Al-Mujadalah which states.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَقَسَّعُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا لِقَاعِ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانْشُرُوا اللَّهُ الِّدِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

Meaning: O you who have believed, when it is said to you, "Make room in assemblies," then make room; Allah will make room for you. And when it is said, "Arise," then arise; Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge by degrees. And Allah is All-Knowing of what you do. (Q.S. Al-Mujadalah/58:11)

In line with this role, today's young ustadz continue to uphold several key characteristics as described in the Qur'an and Hadith. These characteristics include mastery of knowledge in accordance with practice, a straight attitude and correcting others, as well as sincerity and humility, far from ambitions for power and worldly wealth. Young religious leaders today, with broad access to formal and informal education, also prioritize critical thinking and openness, which are relevant for facing various social challenges. They develop an honest and trustworthy approach in spreading religious teachings, and adapt their preaching to the modern social context. Through social media and digital platforms, young clerics not only facilitate public access to religious knowledge but also encourage more open and dialogical discussions.

The important role of scholars in Islamic education is also continued by young ustadz. Like their predecessors who established thousands of pesantren since the 17th century, young ustadz now play a role in religious education in various formal and informal institutions. With their presence in the evolving Islamic education curriculum, young ustadz are able to bridge the unique religious traditions with contemporary contexts, while also preserving the distinctive pesantren traditions in the relationship between teachers and students.

### **The Credibility of Scholars in the Digital Era: Balancing Knowledge and Presentation Style**

In the digital era, the credibility of young scholars is challenged to balance deep knowledge with an engaging presentation style. Although appearance is important to attract attention, knowledge remains the main foundation for ustadz in building public trust. Many young ustadz continue to deepen their education, both formal and informal, in order to balance popularity with the depth of knowledge. The effectiveness of preaching is also influenced by ethos, which combines understanding, feelings, and struggle in delivering the message. According to Aristotle, ethos includes the character, reputation, and image of the speaker, which influence their charisma and credibility. Physical appearance and speaking style also contribute to shaping a preacher's ethos in the eyes of the audience.

This research explores the role of the appearance style of young preachers on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The casual delivery style, simple language, and entertaining format have proven effective in attracting the interest of the younger generation. This approach makes the preaching more easily accepted and relevant to the daily lives of young audiences. Research results show that the relaxed and inclusive appearance of young preachers creates comfort for the audience. Young people who are accustomed to quick and light content tend to be more engaged in preaching presented in the form of vlogs, podcasts, or short videos. This makes the preaching feel more relaxed yet still meaningful and relevant to millennials and Gen Z. However, challenges arise when appearance is prioritized over the substance of the knowledge underlying the preaching. This research also shows that there is a potential danger if too much focus is placed on achieving

popularity and an attractive appearance. When young preachers prioritize visual or entertainment aspects in their preaching, there is a risk that the message conveyed will lose depth and the scholarly standing that should be its foundation. This can lead to a misunderstanding or superficial understanding of Islamic teachings by the audience. The decline in the quality of da'wah content that prioritizes popularity can obscure the message that is actually intended to be conveyed, which in the end can reduce the credibility of scholars in the eyes of the public.

As a result of this research, it was found that the balance between an appealing appearance and substantial knowledge is a key factor in maintaining the credibility of young preachers in the digital world. Young ustadz who can adjust their delivery style with the depth of knowledge will be more effective in conveying beneficial and relevant teachings. By continuing to prioritize a deep mastery of religious knowledge, accompanied by an inclusive and easily understandable delivery style, young ustadz can maintain their credibility as religious figures who are not only popular but also trustworthy. Therefore, it is important for young scholars to realize that although appearance can attract a larger audience, deep knowledge is the determining factor for the quality and sustainability of their preaching in the long term. The connection between the sanad (chain of narration) of knowledge in Islam and the preaching of young ustadz in the digital era is very important. Sanad in this context not only indicates the origin of knowledge but also serves as an indicator of the validity and credibility of the teachings conveyed. As explained in the verses of the Qur'an

فَلَنَسْأَلَنَّ الَّذِينَ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَنَسْأَلَنَّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

Meaning: Indeed, We will question the nations to whom messengers were sent, and indeed, We will question the messengers. (Kami) (Q.S. Al-A'raf/7:6).

Every person who practices something will be held accountable, including in the matter of the knowledge they convey and practice. This illustrates that on the Day of Judgment, every individual will be held accountable for what they practiced and the source of it. The hadith narrated by Abu Abdurrahman al-Marwazi and transmitted by Abdullah b. al-Mubarak emphasizes the importance of "al-atsar," which is the chain of transmission in knowledge. In the conversation, it is explained that on the Day of Judgment, a person will be asked from whom they practiced a certain knowledge. For example, if someone mentions the name of their teacher, that teacher will also be presented before Allah, and this process continues up to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Thus, the sanad becomes a network that connects a student with their teacher, ultimately reaching the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This emphasizes the importance of having a clear sanad in acquiring knowledge, as that will be the accountability before Allah.

Regarding the preaching of young scholars in the digital era, challenges arise when a relaxed and casual delivery style is prioritized over the emphasis on the depth of knowledge that should have a valid chain of transmission (sanad). Young preachers active on social media often use platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok to reach a wider audience. A light and engaging delivery style can help them build a relationship with the audience, but if it is not accompanied by authentic knowledge and a clear chain of transmission, their preaching risks losing depth and even becoming misleading.

The chain of knowledge or al-atsar in this case provides a foundation for young preachers to not only prioritize popularity but also to maintain the credibility of their preaching by ensuring that the knowledge conveyed comes from authentic sources. In digital preaching, where information spreads so easily without strict verification, young scholars must emphasize that although they use engaging delivery styles, the content of their preaching must still contain clear and accountable knowledge. This is in accordance with the teachings of Ibn Aun who stated, "Knowledge is a matter of religion, so pay attention to from whom you obtain your knowledge!"

Thus, maintaining a balance between an appealing appearance and a deep understanding of the chain of knowledge becomes important for young ustadz in the digital era. They are not only responsible for the quality of the sermons delivered, but also must ensure that the messages given have a strong foundation and can be accounted for, both in this world and in the hereafter. The Challenge of Credibility Amidst the Sensationalism Trend In the digital era, the trend of sensationalism also affects the preaching of young clerics on social media. Many pieces of content are created with a dramatic or controversial approach to attract attention, which sometimes sacrifices the depth and credibility of the message. Young preachers on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok often feel compelled to produce viral content, which can shift the focus from the substance of preaching to mere popularity. Sensationalism in preaching creates a dilemma between credibility and popularity. A light and entertaining approach is indeed effective in attracting the younger generation, but it risks diminishing the depth of knowledge conveyed. As a result, some content is more focused on the popularity of clicks and likes rather than the accuracy of religious teachings.

An overly sensational approach can also cause religious messages to lose their depth. Humorous content or controversial opinions can attract attention, but if lacking clear references, this message risks diminishing the ustadz's credibility. Many audiences become less critical and understand religion with declining quality. Although the relaxed preaching style is easily accepted by young audiences, the simplification of messages sometimes makes complex religious material superficial. Mistakes in conveying religious teachings can diminish public trust in scholars, who are supposed to have authority and expertise in religion. Conversely, the credibility of young religious teachers can be maintained if they manage to balance an engaging delivery style with the transmission



of authentic knowledge. One way to overcome this challenge is to firmly uphold the principles of knowledge based on a valid chain of transmission (sanad). Young scholars who have a good understanding of religious sources and convey teachings in accordance with the Qur'an and Hadith will be more easily trusted by the audience. In this case, the message conveyed is not only engaging but also has depth and a strong foundation.

It is important for young ustadz to maintain the integrity of their preaching by ensuring that every message conveyed has a clear foundation, even if it is packaged in a more modern and easily digestible format. By avoiding the trap of excessive sensationalism, young ustadz can remain relevant in the fast-paced digital world without sacrificing the credibility and quality of religious teachings. The phenomenon of physical appearance and attractiveness is increasingly becoming a factor in attracting audiences, especially among the younger generation. Many young preachers utilize physical attractiveness in delivering sermons on social media, especially TikTok. As a popular platform among the youth, TikTok provides them with the opportunity to spread religious messages widely through creative and entertaining short videos.

However, this trend poses challenges related to the credibility and substance of the preaching. Prioritizing appearance to attract an audience does make the preaching seem more relevant, but it can also sacrifice the quality of the knowledge being conveyed. Young preachers who focus too much on appearance and attractive style might get caught up in viral trends, diminishing the depth of the religious message. On TikTok, many sermons are presented with attractive visuals, music, and strong entertainment elements. This successfully attracts an audience, but sometimes produces content that is more sensational than educational. Some preachers even choose controversial topics or showcase a glamorous lifestyle to attract viewers, instead of focusing on the profound and authentic content of their sermons.

As a result, the essence of religious teachings can be reduced, with the audience being more interested in the appearance of the ustadz rather than the religious message. If the purpose of preaching is to convey the true values of religion, a delivery that prioritizes appearance risks diverting attention from the core teachings of the religion itself. Moreover, this trend also risks creating a distortion of religious understanding. When the appearance and lifestyle showcased by young preachers on social media attract more attention than their knowledge, the audience, especially the younger generation, might perceive that preaching is merely about outward appearance or fashion, rather than a deep understanding of religion. This has the potential to make society prioritize physical appearance over the spiritual values taught in religion.

Therefore, young scholars need to be more careful in using digital platforms for preaching. It is indeed important to follow trends and deliver sermons in a way that is engaging for the audience, but what is more important is maintaining the harmony between appearance and the quality of knowledge being conveyed. To ensure that the preaching remains credible and beneficial, young preachers must ensure that the messages conveyed are not only entertaining but also educational, providing correct understanding, and inspiring the audience to practice religious teachings well.

Thus, the success of young ustadz's preaching is not only measured by their popularity or the number of followers they have, but also by the quality of knowledge and messages they convey. In facing the digital era filled with various sensations, maintaining a balance between an appealing appearance and authentic knowledge is key to ensuring that the da'wah remains relevant, beneficial, and grounded in true religious principles.

### **The Role of the Audience in Filtering Digital Da'wah Information**

This research highlights how crucial the role of the audience is in the context of digital da'wah. The audience not only becomes the recipient of information but also functions as a party that, when viewed from the characteristics of TikTok as a user-generated media, offers a number of features that can be utilized by its users. One of TikTok's distinctive features is the music feature, which allows users to add various songs, both licensed and provided by the platform itself. This music can be used as a background, adding an extra dimension to the uploaded content, including for the purpose of preaching.

In the context of preaching, this music feature plays an important role because it can touch the emotional aspects (feelings/affection) of the audience and capture their attention. Music has the power to give a certain mood to the message being conveyed, just like in a film where sound or music can influence the audience's mood. For example, using religious-themed music or nature sounds as a background can strengthen the message of the da'wah being delivered, while also making the content more engaging and captivating for the audience. Besides popular songs or EDM that many people usually use, TikTok also offers a selection of more spiritually nuanced songs that are highly relevant to religious content, providing an additional dimension for young preachers in delivering religious messages more attractively.

Amid the ease of accessing digital preaching content, the audience needs to be critical of the information they receive. Without the ability to filter information accurately according to Islamic teachings, the audience risks obtaining incorrect or even deviating understandings of the true religious teachings. Young ustadz also need criticism and feedback from the audience to maintain the quality of their preaching. In the era of social media, preaching is not just about speaking to the audience, but also listening to feedback, especially from the younger generation active in the online world. A wise and critical audience can provide constructive input, helping young preachers improve their preaching content to remain grounded in authentic knowledge. Criticism from the

audience also serves as a reminder to ensure that religious messages do not get trapped in sensationalism or merely prioritize popularity.

The role of the audience is very important in improving the quality of preaching in the digital era. By being more selective in choosing da'wah content and providing constructive feedback, the audience can encourage young preachers to maintain the substance of their da'wah in accordance with authentic religious teachings. A critical audience ensures that the sermons are not only popular but also beneficial and relevant to the challenges of the times. In addition, the audience must be smart in selecting da'wah content that can truly serve as a guideline. Considering the abundance of circulating content, the audience needs to pay attention to the credibility and authority of the source of the preaching, and ensure that the message conveyed aligns with Islamic principles. By choosing quality content, the audience can prevent the spread of incorrect understanding.

A wise audience should also pay attention to the method of preaching used. Da'wah content delivered in an easily understandable manner and based on true Islamic teachings should be prioritized. They must be able to distinguish between content that only prioritizes entertainment or appearance, and content that truly contains beneficial religious values. Overall, a selective and responsible audience plays an important role in maintaining the quality of digital preaching. By filtering information and selecting content that aligns with the correct teachings, the audience can create a healthy digital environment, provide optimal spiritual benefits, and prevent the spread of erroneous beliefs.

### Pictures and Tables

Table 1. Here is a more Concise and Clear Table of the Research Findings

Aspect	Research Findings
Credibility of Young Ustadz	The balance between an attractive appearance and deep knowledge determines the credibility of young ustadz.
The Challenge of Sensationalism	The Challenge of Sensationalism Sensationalism reduces the depth of preaching and can distort the true understanding of religion.
The Role of the Audience	A critical audience helps filter authentic da'wah information and provides constructive feedback.
The Influence of Physical Appearance	Physical appearance attracts the audience, but it must be balanced with profound substance in the preaching to avoid diminishing the quality of scholarship.

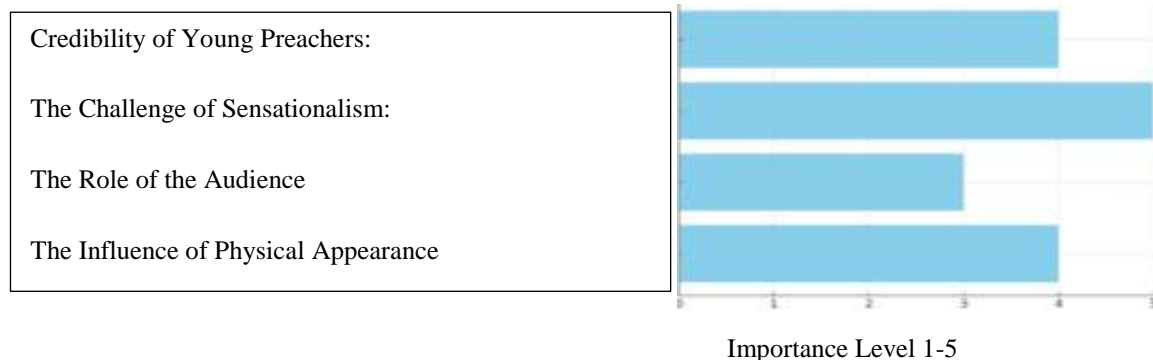


Figure 1. Research Discussion Graph

### The Influence of Physical Appearance

Here is a graph that shows the level of importance of various aspects discussed in the research. Each aspect is given a score from 1 to 5, based on its importance in the context of digital preaching for young preachers: (1) Credibility of Young Preachers: Score 4, indicating that credibility is very important, but it must also be balanced with an engaging delivery style; (2) The Challenge of Sensationalism: Score 3, indicating that sensationalism has an influence, but not as strong as other factors; (3) The Role of the Audience: Score 5, emphasizing the importance of the audience in filtering and providing constructive feedback on the content of the preaching.

The Influence of Physical Appearance: Score 4, indicating that appearance is also important, especially in attracting the attention of a young audience. This graph illustrates the importance of balancing various factors to maintain the quality and credibility of digital preaching.

### CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this study shows that the credibility of young ustadz in the digital era highly depends on the balance between an engaging delivery style and the depth of knowledge conveyed. Although appearance and style, as seen on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, can attract the audience's attention, substance and deep knowledge remain the main foundation in building public trust. Young preachers who can

combine a light delivery style with sound knowledge will be more effective in conveying credible da'wah messages. However, challenges arise with the trend of sensationalism, where many sermons focus on achieving popularity through dramatic or controversial content. Although this approach can attract attention, it risks diminishing the depth of the religious message and can lead to a distortion of the understanding of Islamic teachings. Therefore, young preachers need to be careful that the popularity they gain does not sacrifice the quality and credibility of their preaching. In this case, the success of da'wah is not only measured by popularity but also by the quality of the knowledge conveyed.

In addition, the role of the audience is crucial in maintaining the quality of digital preaching. Wise audiences must be more selective and critical in choosing da'wah content that aligns with the true teachings of Islam. They need to ensure that the received da'wah content comes from credible sources and is delivered in a manner that aligns with religious principles. By providing constructive feedback, the audience can play a role in helping young preachers improve and maintain the quality of their sermons to ensure they remain authentic and relevant. An audience that actively filters da'wah content will ensure that the messages received are not distorted by sensationalism or content that is not based on authentic knowledge. The collaboration between young scholars and wise audiences will create a healthy and beneficial preaching environment for the wider community. The involvement of a critical audience in selecting content can minimize the spread of incorrect information.

The implication of this finding is the importance for young preachers to always maintain integrity in preaching on social media. They must ensure that their delivery style does not prioritize popularity alone, but is also based on authentic knowledge and in accordance with the true teachings of Islam. On the other hand, the audience also plays a significant role in maintaining the quality of the preaching. A critical and selective audience can serve as an effective filter to ensure that the information received is true and beneficial. This also opens up opportunities for social media platforms to educate the audience about the importance of choosing da'wah content that is not only engaging but also high-quality and profound. Overall, the collaboration between young scholars and wise audiences will create a healthy and beneficial digital preaching ecosystem, which can maintain the credibility of religious messages in the online world. The hope for future research is to conduct more in-depth studies on the role of technology and audiences in influencing the credibility of digital preaching. It is hoped that this research can expand the understanding of the impact of sensationalism in preaching and how the audience can be more active in filtering information. Additionally, further research could explore more effective strategies for young preachers in maintaining a balance between popularity and substance in their preaching.

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