

Urban Religious Expressions in the Digital Era: Representations of Piety in Islamic TikTok Content

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan media sosial, khususnya TikTok, telah menghadirkan ruang baru bagi penyebaran pesan keagamaan. Fenomena ini menimbulkan pertanyaan mengenai bagaimana nilai-nilai kesalehan direpresentasikan dan dimaknai ulang dalam ruang digital oleh generasi muda urban. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk representasi kesalehan dalam konten dakwah Islami di TikTok serta resepsi audiens urban terhadap pesan tersebut. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik observasi digital (digital ethnography) terhadap lima video dari tiga kreator populer, yakni @kadamsidik00, @amazmii, dan @risyad_bay, beserta respons audiens di kolom komentar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konten dakwah Islami di TikTok merepresentasikan kesalehan dalam tiga dimensi utama: moral, ritual, dan simbolik. Respons audiens memperlihatkan pola yang beragam, mulai dari apresiatif, kritis, reflektif, hingga humoris, yang mencerminkan keragaman cara generasi muda memaknai pesan dakwah. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa media sosial berperan sebagai ruang diskursif baru bagi masyarakat urban dalam membentuk dan menegosiasikan identitas keagamaan mereka. Secara signifikan, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi akademik melalui penerapan teori representasi Stuart Hall dalam konteks dakwah digital, sekaligus menawarkan wawasan praktis bagi kreator, pendidik, dan lembaga dakwah dalam merancang strategi komunikasi yang relevan dengan dinamika generasi digital.

Kata kunci: TikTok Islami, Representasi Kesalehan, Resepsi Audiens, Generasi Urban, Dakwah Digital, Stuart Hall

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media, particularly TikTok, has created a new space for the dissemination of religious messages. This phenomenon raises questions about how piety is represented and reinterpreted in the digital sphere by urban youth. This study aims to analyze the forms of piety representation in Islamic preaching content on TikTok and to explore the reception of urban audiences toward such messages. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, using digital ethnography to observe five videos from three popular creators—@kadamsidik00, @amazmii, and @risyad_bay—along with audience responses in the comment sections. The findings reveal that Islamic preaching content on TikTok represents piety through three main dimensions: moral, ritual, and symbolic. Audience responses show diverse patterns, ranging from appreciative, critical, and reflective to humorous, reflecting the plurality of ways in which young urban audiences interpret religious messages. These findings emphasize that social media functions as a new discursive space where urban communities construct and negotiate their religious identities. Significantly, this study contributes to academic discourse by applying Stuart Hall's theory of representation to the context of digital da'wah, while also offering practical insights for content creators, educators, and Islamic institutions in designing communication strategies that resonate with the dynamics of the digital generation.

Keywords: Islamic TikTok, Representation of Piety, Audience Reception, Urban Youth, Digital Da'wah, Stuart Hall

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, social media has become a new arena for urban communities to express themselves, communicate, and seek religious insight. TikTok—originally known as a platform for entertainment—has increasingly been used as a vehicle for dakwah (Islamic preaching).

This development reflects a shift in the way Islamic teachings are communicated: from traditional spaces such as mosques and study gatherings to the digital sphere, where messages are shared through short, concise, and easily consumable videos. Such a transformation raises an essential question: how is piety portrayed through digital content, particularly on TikTok, and how do urban audiences engage with these portrayals?

Unlike formal religious practices, the expression of piety on social media often takes on visual, auditory, and narrative forms, using popular symbols that are simple and accessible. This brings about a dual consequence. On one hand, dakwah content becomes more relatable to young audiences and their everyday realities. On the other hand, there is a growing concern that the meaning of piety may be reduced to a matter of aesthetics or trendy symbolism (Norhidayah & Surawan, 2025). This is especially significant given that the majority of TikTok users are young, urban individuals who are accustomed to lighthearted, expressive, and humorous modes of communication. Hence, it becomes necessary to explore not only how Islamic creators construct digital representations of piety, but also how urban viewers interpret and respond to them.

The dynamics within the comment sections further demonstrate that audience responses to dakwah content are far from uniform. Some express gratitude and spiritual benefit, others offer critical or reflective remarks, while many treat such videos as mere entertainment. This diversity of reception suggests that social media is more than just a platform for spreading religious messages—it also serves as a contested space where religious meanings are interpreted and renegotiated. Consequently, TikTok should be viewed as a new discursive domain that contributes to shaping how urban Muslims perceive their faith and religious identity.

Previous research on religion and digital media has discussed similar themes. (Hjarvard, 2011) theory of the mediatization of religion explains how religious practices transform under media logic, while (Campbell, 2017) highlights the emergence of digital religious publics. In Indonesia, (Fealy & White, 2008) identified the rise of “pop-Islam,” which merges Islamic preaching with elements of popular culture. Nevertheless, these studies tend to focus on broader digital dakwah phenomena. Specific analyses of how piety is represented on TikTok—particularly from the standpoint of urban audience reception—remain limited.

This study seeks to address that gap by employing Stuart Hall’s theory of representation as its analytical lens. It focuses on two key aspects: (1) the ways Islamic content creators construct representations of piety through visual styles, symbols, and short narratives on TikTok, and (2) how urban audiences engage with and respond to these representations through comments and digital interactions. By combining both message production and audience reception, this research offers a more holistic perspective compared to earlier studies.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on TikTok, whose algorithm, short-form video design, and interactive culture distinguish it from other social media platforms. Using a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how piety is represented, interpreted, and negotiated by both creators and audiences. Through this analysis, the study aims to reveal the ways in which digital spaces contribute to the ongoing production and circulation of religious meanings in urban contexts.

From an academic standpoint, this research enriches the fields of media, communication, and religious studies, particularly in examining how faith is represented in online environments. Practically, its findings can serve as a guide for da’i (preachers) and content creators in designing dakwah strategies that resonate with young urban audiences while maintaining theological depth. On a broader social level, the study reaffirms that social media—despite its association with entertainment—plays a vital role in shaping contemporary urban religious consciousness and identity.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The qualitative design was chosen because it is best suited to explore the meanings behind the representations of piety in Islamic TikTok content, as well as to understand how urban audiences interpret and respond to such messages. Rather than focusing on quantitative measurement, this research emphasizes

interpretation, meaning-making, and the construction of social realities that emerge through digital interactions.

The research focuses on three Islamic TikTok creator accounts: @kadamsidik00, @amazmii, and @risyad_bay. These accounts were selected using purposive sampling, as all three consistently produce dakwah-themed content and have active urban audiences who frequently engage in the comment sections. The primary data consist of the five most recent videos from each account, along with the audience responses found in the comments. Accordingly, the dataset encompasses various dimensions of piety representation—visual, auditory, symbolic, and narrative—as well as audience reactions, including appreciation, criticism, humor, and reflective commentary.

Data collection was carried out through digital observation employing a digital ethnography approach. This process involved observing, recording, and categorizing both video content and audience comments. All collected data were analyzed using Stuart Hall's theory of representation to investigate how meanings of piety are constructed by content creators and reinterpreted by audiences. The analysis was conducted in three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

To ensure data validity, the study applied source triangulation by cross-examining findings from videos, audience comments, and relevant literature on digital dakwah. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how piety is represented within Islamic TikTok content and to illustrate how urban religious practices are shaped and negotiated within digital media spaces.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms and Representations of Piety in Islamic TikTok Content

The results of this study indicate that Islamic dakwah content on TikTok conveys representations of piety that can be grouped into three interrelated dimensions: moral, ritual, and symbolic. These dimensions complement one another and together form a distinctive model of digital dakwah—concise, straightforward, and easily accepted by urban youth audiences.

The moral dimension emerges as the most prominent feature in the creators' content. The messages typically emphasize practical ethics and everyday virtues such as patience during hardship, gratitude for blessings, sincerity in action, and avoidance of envy or hatred. For instance, @amazmii often highlights the importance of patience (*sabar*) and reliance on God (*tawakal*) through short, relatable stories told in a simple and light-hearted manner, making them easily digestible for younger viewers. Similarly, @risyad_bay frequently encourages sincerity (*ikhlas*), gratitude (*syukur*), and consistency in faith (*istiqomah*). These moral teachings are delivered in an intimate, empathetic, and conversational style that makes dakwah feel closer to the everyday concerns of urban youth. This suggests that digital dakwah today functions not only as a religious reminder but also as a source of psychological and emotional support (Haliza & Surawan, 2025).

The ritual dimension also plays a meaningful role, although its intensity varies among creators. @kadamsidik00 expresses this aspect more explicitly by encouraging audiences to maintain prayer, remain steadfast in worship, and avoid sinful behavior. These calls are often reinforced by direct references to the Qur'an and Hadith, lending greater religious authority to the messages. In contrast, @amazmii and @risyad_bay seldom address ritual acts directly, yet they still incorporate implicit reminders of devotion through messages about perseverance, faith, and good deeds. This shows that the ritual aspect in Islamic TikTok content can appear in both direct and subtle forms, depending on each creator's communication style.

The symbolic dimension appears most consistently in all three accounts. Nearly every video features Islamic expressions such as Allah, Astaghfirullah, MasyaAllah, or short prayers that reinforce the religious tone. These expressions serve not only as linguistic ornaments but also as affirmations of faith identity for both creators and audiences. The visual presentation further strengthens this dimension: plain or neutral backgrounds, modest clothing, and minimalistic aesthetics create an impression of sincerity and authenticity. This simplicity directs attention toward

the message rather than visual embellishment. In this sense, Islamic symbols on TikTok operate on two levels—signifying religious identity and cultivating a spiritual atmosphere in digital communication.

Together, the moral, ritual, and symbolic dimensions form a distinctive pattern of piety representation in digital dakwah. @amazmii and @risyad_bay tend to emphasize moral and symbolic elements, while @kadamsidik00 integrates all three, particularly the ritual aspect, in a more explicit manner. Although their approaches differ, they share common characteristics: visual simplicity, an approachable tone, and a focus on substance over form. These features demonstrate that Islamic dakwah on TikTok is designed to suit the preferences of the urban generation—brief, practical, and emotionally engaging while remaining spiritually meaningful.

Further analysis shows that piety representation on Islamic TikTok can also be understood through the types of content, narrative and visual composition, and the emerging tendency toward commodification. Some creators produce educational content that delivers concise religious teachings, as seen in @kadamsidik00, who often reminds followers about prayer and avoidance of sin while citing scriptural sources. Others, like @amazmii, focus on reflective content, using motivational language that inspires self-awareness and emotional reflection. A smaller portion of creators combine religious messages with lifestyle or promotional elements, such as showcasing casual Islamic fashion or featuring products aligned with Muslim identity. Although this trend is not dominant, it reflects an ongoing interaction between dakwah and popular culture.

Piety in Islamic TikTok content is represented not only through verbal messages but also through visual and narrative expression. For example, @risyad_bay presents himself in modest clothing that conveys a religious impression, while @kadamsidik00 displays direct acts of worship, such as reciting prayers or quoting verses from the Qur'an. Meanwhile, @amazmii uses calm narration and simple visuals to emphasize the message's substance over aesthetics. Many creators also incorporate soft background music or filters with gentle tones to enhance the spiritual mood. These stylistic choices show that the representation of piety in TikTok content is shaped by the interplay of words, visuals, and atmosphere.

Another key finding is the tension between spiritual expression and commodification. On one hand, Islamic dakwah on TikTok spreads moral and spiritual values that resonate with urban youth. On the other hand, some creators engage with the logic of the digital marketplace by incorporating product promotions or lifestyle branding—such as Islamic fashion, halal cosmetics, or faith-based consumption trends. This indicates that digital piety is not always a purely spiritual act but can also serve as a means of building personal branding and popularity. Consequently, piety on TikTok is ambivalent: it functions simultaneously as an instrument of dakwah and as part of a broader consumer culture. This observation aligns with Norhidayah and Surawan (2025), who discuss the transformation of spirituality into popular expression, and Haliza and Surawan (2025), who stress the importance of maintaining balance between spiritual depth and digital visibility.

It should be emphasized that these findings are based on the analysis of selected videos used as research samples. Thus, the discussion of piety representation is not intended to describe all content produced by each creator but rather to highlight the recurring patterns observed in the analyzed data. The study therefore remains within its empirical boundaries and avoids generalizing its conclusions to the entirety of Islamic dakwah on TikTok.

Urban Audience Reception and Response to Islamic TikTok Content

The reception of urban audiences toward Islamic dakwah content on TikTok demonstrates a rich diversity of meanings and reactions. This variety is evident from the comment sections of popular Islamic accounts such as @kadamsidik00, @amazmii, and @risyad_bay. Most of the viewers come from younger urban generations who interpret the content through different emotional and intellectual lenses—some respond seriously and appreciatively, others critically or reflectively, while some treat it primarily as entertainment. Drawing on (Hall, 1980) theory of media reception, audiences engage with content through three positions—dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings. Within this framework, TikTok users are not passive receivers but active meaning-makers who reinterpret religious messages according to their personal

experiences, values, and social contexts.

On @kadamsidik00's account, audience responses can be grouped into three main tendencies. The first is positive-appreciative feedback, where many users express gratitude for the concise, relatable, and easily understood delivery of dakwah messages that resonate with their everyday lives. The second involves critical or inquiry-based responses, as users often ask direct religious questions—such as issues regarding fiqh or worship practices like prayer intentions or the permissibility of wearing accessories. This suggests that the comment section has evolved into a participatory space for digital religious discussion. The third pattern comprises neutral or humorous comments, which are unrelated to the main topic—mentioning games, jokes, or light banter—indicating that a segment of the audience views TikTok mainly as a platform for casual entertainment.

In contrast, @amazmii's audience demonstrates a more fluid mix of seriousness and humor. Some comments take on a spiritual and supportive tone, reinforcing messages of remembrance (dzikir), Asmaul Husna recitation, or moral reflection. However, there are also critical and reflective comments that explore deeper theological questions about human effort (ikhtiar), death, and divine will. Interestingly, many users respond with playful humor, making jokes about food or boarding school life—illustrating how urban audiences blend religious engagement with a sense of levity typical of digital culture. This phenomenon highlights the urban generation's communication style: they are capable of balancing seriousness in faith with humor and informality when interacting online.

Meanwhile, the audience of @risyad_bay displays an even broader range of responses. Numerous comments are appreciative, emphasizing that the relaxed yet meaningful delivery makes dakwah messages easier to internalize. Others are critical, requesting deeper explanations or comparing his interpretations to those of other preachers. This indicates that urban audiences—accustomed to broad access to religious information—approach online dakwah with critical awareness and intellectual engagement. At the same time, humorous and playful comments also appear, showing that viewers engage with content not only for spiritual reflection but also for enjoyment. In addition, several comments are deeply reflective, suggesting that the messages genuinely touch the audience's spiritual consciousness.

Taken together, these findings reveal that urban audience reception of Islamic TikTok content is pluralistic and fluid. Positive and appreciative reactions indicate a growing demand among youth for dakwah that is light yet meaningful. Critical responses reflect the rational and open-minded tendencies of urban digital natives who are accustomed to dialogical learning. Humorous interactions demonstrate the expressive and creative identity of the digital generation, which resists rigid or overly formal modes of communication. Meanwhile, reflective comments show that even within a popular medium like TikTok, religious messages can still awaken genuine spiritual awareness.

Thus, TikTok serves not merely as a space for entertainment but also as a discursive arena where urban Muslims negotiate, reinterpret, and construct their sense of religiosity within the dynamics of digital culture.

The Implications of Social Media for Urban Religious Practices and Identities

The rise of Islamic dakwah on TikTok extends beyond the surface level of creators' representations and audience engagement. It carries significant implications for how urban Muslims experience, practice, and express their faith. Social media—especially TikTok—has opened a new digital environment where expressions of piety are continuously shaped, circulated, and reinterpreted through everyday interactions.

To begin with, TikTok has contributed to the development of a more adaptable and convenient model of religious engagement. The brevity and accessibility of Islamic content enable young audiences to gain religious insights quickly, without the need to attend traditional religious gatherings. As a result, acts of worship and religious learning are no longer confined to mosques or pesantren, but have expanded into virtual spaces accessible at any moment. This shift reflects the emergence of a form of urban religiosity that is fast-paced, practical, and integrated with the lifestyle of the digital generation.

In addition, social media platforms have strengthened the formation of digital religious identities. Through online participation—commenting, liking, and sharing—users take an active role in shaping the flow of Islamic discourse rather than merely consuming it. Urban faith identities thus become more diverse, fluid, and open to reinterpretation. Many young Muslims express their religious affiliation digitally, whether by sharing Islamic messages, posting prayers, or embedding religious symbols into their social media activities.

Furthermore, TikTok's popularity and algorithmic structure have also given rise to the commercialization of piety. Religious values and practices are often transformed into engaging, visually appealing content that aligns with audience trends and digital marketing logic. While this may appear to commodify faith, it simultaneously reflects religion's ability to adapt to new media environments. Rather than diminishing spirituality, it demonstrates how religious expression evolves alongside cultural and technological change.

Taken together, these developments reveal a transformation in urban religiosity—a move away from rigid, ritual-centered devotion toward forms of piety that are inclusive, flexible, experiential, and seamlessly embedded in digital daily life. TikTok, therefore, functions not only as an entertainment platform but also as a dynamic social space where urban Muslims construct, negotiate, and display their religious identities in a constantly shifting digital culture.

CONCLUSION

Hasil The findings of this study reveal that the representation of piety in Islamic dakwah content on TikTok can be categorized into three main dimensions: moral, ritual, and symbolic. Content creators such as @kadamsidik00, @amazmii, and @risyad_bay convey religious messages through simple storytelling, concise narratives, and familiar Islamic symbols that resonate with the everyday lives of young audiences. This demonstrates that digital dakwah can be effectively carried out through popular media platforms without relying on conventional religious spaces.

From the perspective of audience reception, urban viewers exhibit diverse and multi-layered responses. Some express appreciation, others engage critically or reflectively, while many respond with humor. This variety indicates that religious messages are not uniformly interpreted; rather, they are reconstructed and personalized according to the audience's cultural background and communicative style characteristic of the urban youth generation. The TikTok comment section thus becomes an interactive arena of dialogue, where audiences actively participate in shaping the meanings of religious discourse rather than passively consuming it.

Overall, the findings underscore that social media—particularly TikTok—plays a significant role in transforming urban religious practices. Acts of piety are no longer confined to traditional spaces of worship but are increasingly expressed, debated, and redefined within the digital sphere. Consequently, social media emerges as a new site for the formation of religious identity, one that is more fluid, plural, and responsive to the dynamics of modern urban life.

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