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TikTok as an Islamic Da'wah Media in Shaping Religious Imitation, Sympathy, and Empathy Among Generation Z

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Abstract	The development of digital media has transformed Islamic preaching from conventional methods into interactive and participatory communication spaces. Among these platforms, TikTok has become one of the most influential media for da'wah, especially among Generation Z. This study aims to analyze the role of TikTok as an Islamic da'wah medium in fostering religious imitation, sympathy, and empathy among young Muslims. This study examines TikTok's role as an Islamic da'wah medium in shaping religious imitation, sympathy, and empathy among Generation Z audiences. Employing a qualitative content analysis of selected Islamic da'wah accounts alongside in-depth interviews with Generation Z users, this research explores how religious messages are presented, internalised, and emotionally responded to on the platform. The findings indicate that TikTok facilitates religious imitation through repetitive exposure to visible religious practices, encourages sympathy by presenting relatable moral narratives, and fosters empathy through emotionally resonant storytelling and interactive features such as comments and duets. Using a qualitative approach with a field research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with followers of TikTok da'wah creators and observations of their content and user interactions. The findings show that TikTok-based digital da'wah plays a significant role in shaping Generation Z's religious awareness through positive forms of social imitation. Qur'anic values such as hikmah (wisdom) and maw'izhah hasanah (good counsel) are contextually represented, making da'wah more engaging, educational, and capable of fostering religious reflection among young social media users. Therefore, TikTok as a medium of Islamic da'wah plays an essential role in nurturing a reflective, empathetic, and contextually relevant form of religiosity within the dynamics of digital culture.
Keywords	TikTok, Da'wah, Imitation, Religious

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought major changes to patterns of human communication. Social media is now not only a form of entertainment, but has become a primary need for modern society because it can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Every individual can easily create and share content, making social media the main platform for exchanging messages and information (Febriana, 2021). This change has also had implications for the field of Islamic da'wah, requiring

preachers to adapt to the changing times and utilize technology as an effective instrument of da'wah (Putra & dkk., 2023). The success of da'wah today is not only determined by the substance of the material but also by the extent to which media is used (Manager & Robi, 2022).

One of the platforms that stands out in the transformation of digital da'wah is TikTok. This application, which was originally identical to entertainment content, has now evolved into an alternative medium for conveying positive messages, including Islamic da'wah. The short video format, creative features, interactivity, and ease of sharing make TikTok attractive in reaching a wide audience (Kusumawati & Sitika, 2024). With an algorithm that supports massive content distribution, TikTok has strong potential to be used as a da'wah medium, especially for Generation Z who are known for their close relationship with technology and social media (Ibad, 2024). As one study shows, the use of TikTok in da'wah is able to increase the effectiveness of delivering Islamic messages with a style that is relevant and aligned with the preferences of young people today (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Generation Z as digital natives have unique characteristics compared to previous generations. They prefer short, concise, and visually appealing content that is easy to understand rather than long explanations that tend to feel boring (Susanti et al., 2025). Studies show that most Generation Z users use TikTok not only as entertainment, but also as one of the main sources of information including religious content and are able to internalize the da'wah messages they receive into daily practices (Al-Attas, 1999). Moreover, their content consumption patterns show a tendency to trust messages delivered creatively and visually rather than long sermons presented conventionally. This phenomenon has been utilized by several public figures, one of whom is the young figure Kadam Sidik (Husain Basyaiban), a preacher from Madura (Bangkalan), known for successfully optimizing TikTok and other digital media through simple language, humor, and communicative delivery, making his da'wah easily accepted by Generation Z (Huda, 2023). Husain successfully presents da'wah based on the Qur'an and Hadith in short visual formats that touch upon aspects of creed, Islamic law, and ethics, making them more acceptable to young audiences. Through his official account, Husain presents da'wah content that is informative, inspiring, and relevant to contemporary developments. This shows that TikTok can become an effective space for instilling Islamic values through a simple yet substantial approach (Putra & dkk., 2023).

However, the use of TikTok as a da'wah medium does not come without challenges. This platform is vulnerable to misuse for spreading negative content, misinformation, and even content that may damage the image of Islam (Ibad, 2024). Therefore, digital literacy becomes a crucial skill for preachers and da'wah content creators. By understanding the algorithm, managing content effectively, and maintaining the quality of messages, preachers can compete with non-educational content dominating the digital space. These efforts are important to ensure that da'wah messages remain authentic, creative, and relevant to current conditions. Research on the use of TikTok as a da'wah medium has been widely conducted by previous scholars. Febriana (2021), in her study entitled Utilization of TikTok as a Da'wah Medium: A Case Study of Ustadz Syam on the Account @syam_elmarusy, explains that the use of short video features and a light delivery style makes TikTok effective as a da'wah medium favored by young audiences (Febriana, 2021). Rahmadhani and Wikandina (2023) also emphasize that the account @okisetianadewi_official successfully builds emotional closeness with audiences toward Islamic values through persuasive and contextual communication styles (Febriana, 2021). Rahmadhani and Wikandina (2023) also emphasize that the account @okisetianadewi_official successfully builds emotional closeness with audiences toward Islamic values through persuasive and contextual communication styles (Rahmadhani & Lailla Wikandina, 2023). However, this research differs from previous studies because

it focuses on analyzing how religious imitation, sympathy, and empathy are formed through digital interaction on TikTok within the context of the mediatization of religion, thus offering a new perspective on Islamic da'wah practices among Generation Z.The urgency of studying da'wah through TikTok is increasingly evident considering that this platform is not only used as entertainment, but also as a source of knowledge including religious understanding. Thus, this research offers novelty by presenting an analysis of Islamic da'wah through the TikTok application as a da'wah media for Generation Z, with the expectation of making a meaningful contribution to the development of digital da'wah literacy in the modern era.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a field research design focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the role of TikTok da'wah media in building religious imitation, sympathy, and empathy among Generation Z. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with followers of TikTok da'wah creators who demonstrated imitation behavior, religious sympathy, and empathy toward the content they follow, as well as direct observation of video content and digital interaction patterns on the platform. Secondary data in the form of relevant literature and previous studies were used to strengthen the analysis. Data were analyzed descriptively and analytically using Gabriel Tarde's Social Imitation Theory (Tarde, 1903), Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), and Stig Hjarvard's concept of the Mediatization of Religion to understand how Islamic values are internalized through processes of imitation, symbolic communication, and emotional engagement in the digital sphere (Hjarvard, 2008).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Representation of Digital Da'wah on TikTok: Context and Communication Patterns of Generation Z

The phenomenon of da'wah on digital platforms is one form of transformation in religious communication in the era of media technology. TikTok, as one of the most popular social media platforms among Generation Z, has become a new space for the dissemination of da'wah messages packaged creatively and interactively. The Qur'anic values contained in QS. An-Naḥl [16]: 125, "Call (mankind) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best", become an ethical communication principle that remains relevant amidst technological shifts. The principles of wisdom (ḥikmah), good advice (mawʿiẓah ḥasanah), and courteous dialogue (mujādalah billatī hiya aḥsan) serve as moral guidelines in contemporary digital da'wah practices (Al-Marāghī, 1993).

The shift of da'wah from conventional spaces to digital platforms such as TikTok marks a fundamental change in religious communication patterns. Its characteristics short video formats, speed, and accessibility make religious messages more easily reach audiences accustomed to instant content. In this context, the interaction between the preacher, the TikTok algorithm, and the audience forms a dynamic network of digital da'wah (Kusumawati & Sitika, 2024). Da'wah is no longer limited to face-to-face majlis, but is also present in media networks that can be accessed anytime and anywhere (Manager & Robi, 2022). The digital space in TikTok does not only function as a medium for delivering messages, but also as a space of social interaction that involves audience participation. The audience can ask questions, respond, and even interpret da'wah messages according to their own life context (Rahmadhani & Lailla Wikandina, 2023). This phenomenon shows that da'wah on TikTok is no longer

one-directional, but involves reciprocal interaction between creators and users (Hidayat et al., 2025). This pattern also illustrates the practice of mujādalah billatī hiya aḥsan in online communication, namely engaging in dialogue politely, respectfully, and oriented toward understanding rather than debate.

In addition to expanding its reach, the TikTok platform also requires da'wah to adapt to the logic of digital media. Religious messages are packaged in short, concise, and visually creative formats so they can compete with the dominance of entertainment content (Susanti et al., 2025). For instance, the use of humor, background music, and popular trends are combined with moral messages, making them more easily accepted by young audiences. This proves that da'wah in the digital era is not only about the message, but also about how the message is packaged to remain relevant to contemporary media consumption patterns (Putra & dkk., 2023). TikTok may also be viewed as a digital public space where the transformation of religious authority takes place. If previously da'wah was dominated by mosques, study circles, or conventional mass media, today religious authority also exists on open and democratic digital platforms (Campbell, 2012). Recent studies show that social media, particularly TikTok, blurs the boundaries between sacred and profane spaces because religious messages may appear alongside entertainment and popular culture (Hjarvard, 2008). Moreover, TikTok demonstrates the potential for the formation of transnational digital da'wah communities. Cross-nation, cross-language, and cross-cultural interactions allow Islamic messages to spread more broadly and form global solidarity based on religious values (Mcclure, 2019). Research on the "Digital Ummah" shows that religious practices in digital space do not only produce passive audiences, but also active participants who help spread religious messages through comments, sharing, or remixing content (Campbell, 2012). Therefore, TikTok is not only a medium for distributing da'wah, but also an arena for shaping religious identity for the digital generation.

Although packaged with a popular approach, da'wah content on TikTok generally still carries moral and spiritual values. Da'wah messages that emphasize gentle language and persuasive approaches are more easily accepted by Generation Z because they provide space for reflection without pressure. Such an approach aligns with the spirit of mawʿiẓah ḥasanah, which conveys truth in a joyful and educational manner. Generation Z possesses communication characteristics that are dynamic, visual, and emotionally driven. They tend to be more responsive to messages packaged through narrative style and visual storytelling. Therefore, da'wah that utilizes emotional elements such as humor, empathy, and personal experiences is more effective in fostering religious engagement. This phenomenon shows that the value of *ḥikmah* in da'wah is not only related to the substance of the message, but also to the choice of medium and communication style relevant to the audience. Generation Z tends to adopt religious models they encounter on digital platforms, including clothing styles, expressions of worship, and even ways of conveying moral messages. The shift of da'wah activities to TikTok as a digital da'wah space reflects the process of the mediatization of religion, in which religious practices adapt to the logic of modern media that is fast-paced, visual, and interactive. Through this transformation, Islamic da'wah is no longer confined to sacred spaces, but evolves into a religious activity occurring within an open and participatory digital sphere (Hjarvard, 2008).

The Process of Imitation, Sympathy, and Empathy in Digital Da'wah Interaction

The phenomenon of digital da'wah on TikTok shows that Generation Z is not merely a passive consumer of religious content, but also participates in the process of imitating religious values and behaviors. This aligns with Gabriel Tarde's Theory of Imitation, which explains that social change often

begins with the act of imitating figures considered relevant or possessing moral authority (Tarde, 1903). In this context, da'wah creators such as Husain Basyaiban (Kadam Sidik) possess a unique appeal through communicative delivery that is concise and relatable to the lives of younger audiences. Interview findings with one of his followers, Sandi (24), reinforce this understanding. He mentioned that he began following Kadam Sidik's account in 2023 due to the relevance of the da'wah style to contemporary needs. In his interview, he stated:

> "I have been following Kadam Sidik's account since 2023 because his da'wah uses social media in a way that is easy to receive for Gen Z." (Interview, 2025).

This statement indicates that initial interest emerged not solely because of the da'wah content, but because of the media form and communication style considered relevant. Within Tarde's framework, this marks the early stage of imitation: interest driven by social and psychological suitability. The process then develops into behavioral imitation. Young TikTok da'wah creators often present a simple and friendly communication style, discussing themes relatable to audiences such as motivation to study, honesty, and moral challenges in the digital world. This approach positions the creator as a social model for followers. Bandura explains that individuals tend to imitate the behavior of those perceived as credible, authoritative, or sharing similar age and experience (Bandura, 1971). Due to generational similarity, young audiences perceive the creator's religious experience as realistic and applicable to daily life. The tendency to imitate also appears strongly in the application of values conveyed by the creator. Sandi admitted that most of Husain's content influences how he manages his daily learning process. He explained:

> "From all of his content, the most motivating one for me is his message about continuing to learn anywhere and anytime. I also practice his learning method, especially the time management approach he once explained." (Interview, 2025)

This explanation shows that imitation occurring is not merely superficial—such as copying speech style or physical presentation but extends to habitual behavioral patterns that require discipline. Tarde terms this logical imitation, referring to imitation that involves conscious decisions based on perceived beneficial values (Tarde, 1903). Beyond behavioral imitation, religious sympathy also emerged: a tendency to understand and feel emotional closeness with religious values delivered. Sandi described this when explaining the impact of Husain's delivery style:

> "His method of using examples and comparing scholars' opinions makes it easier for me to listen and understand, so I can apply it in worship and learning." (Interview, 2025)

Beyond behavioral imitation, religious sympathy also emerged: a tendency to understand and feel emotional closeness with religious values delivered. Sandi described this when explaining the impact of Husain's delivery style:

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This indicates that sympathy emerges because the approach is argumentative yet light. A da'wah style grounded in concrete examples strengthens message reception, in line with Rahmawati's (2023) findings which suggest that contextual da'wah communication enhances emotional acceptance among youth. Additionally, the interviews reveal the emergence of religious empathy meaning the urge to engage in religious behavior more actively. Sandi mentioned significant changes after routinely following Husain's content:

> "There are many changes I feel, especially in learning and worship routines. I became more motivated to improve myself and spread da'wah properly." (Interview, 2025)

In addition to Sandi, an interview with a second informant, identified as Ulfi (20), strengthens the conclusion that digital da'wah can shape study habits and religious behavior. She has been following Husain's content since late 2022. During the interview, she stated:

"At first, I watched because the videos kept appearing on my For You Page. Over time, I felt his explanations made me think and want to improve myself. Now I routinely take notes of important points from his videos." (Interview, 2025)

This statement shows that imitation emerges through repeated exposure to content, eventually developing into personal practice. Remarkably, Ulfi has begun documenting key da'wah points she finds meaningful reflecting the internalization of religious values through habitual routine. From both informants, emotional religious sympathy is also evident a sense of emotional closeness to the values shared by the creator. Sympathy emerges because Husain frequently uses concrete examples, scholarly comparison, and non-authoritarian explanations. Sandi expressed that this method helps him understand religion more comfortably, while Ulfi admitted that such explanations often prompt her to reflect on her daily actions. Sympathy, therefore, becomes a foundational stage toward religious empathy. Both informants acknowledged experiencing behavioral change after consistently following da'wah content on TikTok. Sandi stated:

"There are many changes I feel, especially in my learning and worship spirit. I became more motivated to improve myself and spread da'wah well." (Interview, 2025)

Meanwhile, Ulfi shared:

"Now I pay more attention to prayer, studying, and how I speak. Like, when I'm about to get angry, I remember what he said about manners." (Interview, 2025)

These findings indicate that TikTok is not merely an entertainment platform, but also a moral education space grounded in role modeling. Short repeated content supported by inspirational narratives and appealing visuals strengthens repetitive imitation patterns, as proposed by Tarde. The habits of watching, saving, and sharing da'wah content create a religious social environment that encourages the continuity of values.(Tarde, 1903).

The phenomena of imitation, sympathy, and empathy found in the field illustrate that digital media is not simply a channel of information transmission, but a space for internalizing values. Digital da'wah that applies the principles of ḥikmah and humane communication has successfully transformed how Generation Z understands and expresses religiosity. Within this context, the mediatization of religion occurs when media becomes part of the religious practice itself, where digital interaction shapes moral and spiritual consciousness.

3.2. Implications of TikTok Digital Da'wah on the Formation of Religious Awareness Among Generation Z

The process of imitation in digital da'wah encourages the formation of a new type of religious awareness among Generation Z. This awareness is reflective not merely understanding religious texts, but internalizing the moral meaning contained within them. Young people actively engaged with da'wah content on TikTok demonstrate a form of religious awareness born from social experience rather than solely from formal instruction. Digital da'wah thus becomes a living space of spiritual learning, where Islamic messages are practiced within the rhythm of everyday communication (Putri & Astutik, 2021). Changes in da'wah content consumption patterns show that digital media now functions as a social learning space. Values such as honesty, simplicity, and responsibility often appear in short narratives that are easy to understand and remember.

Qur'anic values such as ḥikmah and mujādalah billatī hiya aḥsan are now reinterpreted in digital communication practices. Da'wah creators invite audiences to think, dialogue, and emulate goodness through examples close to daily life. Tarde refers to this process as creative adaptation, a social adjustment in which existing values continue to live through new forms relevant to the times (Tarde, 1903). Through social media, classical da'wah values are revived in a participatory form, allowing younger generations to understand Islamic teachings in ways that feel natural to them. The da'wah interactions taking place on TikTok show that the processes of imitation, sympathy, and religious empathy experienced by da'wah followers do not stop at practical behavioral change, but extend further to shaping how they build religious consciousness. Values received through short da'wah content such as learning habits, speech etiquette, and perspectives on worship gradually become internalized as part of how they think and experience religion. This pattern of interaction demonstrates that digital da'wah is not only a medium of message transmission but a space for constructing religious meaning, where Generation Z reinterprets their relationship with Islamic values. When moral messages are repeated, presented with concrete examples, and framed with relatable language, they are not only imitated but begin to live within spiritual consciousness.

One of the key implications is a transformation in religious understanding. Repeated imitation leads followers not only to copy external practices such as learning habits, but also to understand the moral meaning behind the creator's message. Islamic values become more "real" and relevant because they are delivered within the context of daily life. Previous studies have noted that TikTok-based da'wah can improve Islamic value comprehension among Generation Z (Rejeki et al., 2024). Spiritually, digital da'wah also strengthens emotional bonding with religion. Because values are presented through personal narratives and the creator's lived experiences, followers feel emotionally "connected." This sense of closeness contributes to the development of deeper religious commitment—not merely watching content, but perceiving religion as part of identity. Meta-analysis studies show that social media has a significant and complex impact on shaping Gen Z religiosity, including functioning as a space for spiritual expression (Ahdiyanti & Ida Waluyati, 2021). Moreover, this shift in religious awareness encourages concrete action. Followers who imitate values later apply them in daily life through consistent worship, deeper religious learning, or even engaging in da'wah themselves. This represents meaningful religious empathy not merely agreeing with a message but embodying it as a lifestyle. This digital da'wah model demonstrates that content creators can serve as effective agents of spiritual education.

From a social perspective, digital da'wah has created a community of religious values at a digital scale. Audiences who collectively imitate and internalize shared values form a new social space: a moral community built through "social contagion" where religious behaviors are shared and practiced together. Tarde's theory emphasizes imitation as the fundamental mechanism of social spread, and within digital da'wah, this mechanism produces value-based solidarity among users. However, these implications also present challenges. The transformation of religious awareness driven by digital media risks becoming shallow if da'wah content prioritizes virality over meaningful understanding. Studies indicate that TikTok users sometimes consume religious content superficially without deeper reflection (Abdusshomad, 2024). In other words, some responses are only performative following trends or seeking social validation. Blumer argues that social meaning may shift when symbols are used without reflective interpretation. Some TikTok users display religious empathy merely as personal branding rather than authentic religious practice. Therefore, digital da'wah must be directed not only toward

generating emotional engagement but also toward nurturing reflective awareness of genuine Islamic values.

Da'wah creators and Muslim educators must maintain balance between media appeal and moral depth to ensure that the religious consciousness formed is substantive. Thus, religious sympathy and empathy through digital interactions on TikTok become a new phenomenon illustrating how religion is understood not only as a system of teachings but also as affective and relational practice. The symbolic interaction occurring between creator and audience produces a shared spiritual space where Islamic values are lived, felt, and emotionally responded to. Therefore, understanding religious sympathy and empathy on TikTok means understanding the new dynamics of Islamic da'wah that touches the heart, cultivates care, and strengthens moral solidarity amidst the fast-paced digital culture. Authors should discuss the results and how they can be interpreted from the perspective of previous studies and of the working hypotheses. The findings and their implications should be discussed in the broadest context possible. Future research directions may also be highlighted. The following components should be covered in the discussion: How do your results relate to the original question or objectives outlined in the Introduction section (what/how)? Do you provide interpretation scientifically for each of your results or findings presented (why)? Are your results consistent with what other investigators have reported (what else)? Or are there any differences?

4. CONCLUSION

TikTok as a social media platform has emerged as a new space for Islamic da'wah that bridges religious messages with the communication style of the digital generation. Through creative, interactive, and participatory content, TikTok not only disseminates Islamic teachings but also contributes to shaping the religious character of Generation Z. Religious imitation encourages users to adopt positive behaviors and expressions of faith, religious sympathy fosters emotional connection and interest in Islamic values, while religious empathy strengthens moral commitment and digital social responsibility. The integration of these three dimensions indicates that TikTok-based da'wah has evolved beyond message delivery toward the formation of meaningful religious experience. Therefore, digital da'wah must continue to be directed toward strengthening authentic Islamic values, deepening spiritual understanding, and fostering a generation that is religious, reflective, and ethical within the dynamics of digital culture.

Building on these findings, this research opens opportunities for further exploration of digital da'wah phenomena in the era of social media, particularly among Generation Z. Future studies may involve a larger and more diverse group of informants to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of imitation, sympathy, and religious empathy occurring within different cultural or community contexts. In addition, comparative studies across digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts are important to determine how differences in algorithms, content formats, and interaction patterns influence the effectiveness of digital da'wah. Longitudinal research is also needed to examine the extent to which the influence of da'wah content is sustained over time and not merely a temporary response. Thus, future studies not only enrich the theoretical discourse surrounding digital da'wah, but also contribute to the development of da'wah strategies that are more adaptive, meaningful, and relevant to the dynamics of technological advancement.

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