

## SOCIAL REPRESENTATION AND ETHICAL COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC PREACHING

(A Content Analysis of Gus Miftah's Viral Video on the Sweet Iced Tea Seller  
Incident)

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**Abstract** : This study is motivated by significant changes in da'wah (Islamic preaching) practices in the digital era, where social media has become a new space for preachers to deliver religious messages, while also presenting complex ethical and social meaning challenges. The viral video of Gus Miftah involving a sweet iced tea vendor serves as a concrete example of how a da'wah message can generate controversy due to its social representation and communicative style. Using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this research aims to analyze how meaning is constructed, conveyed, and interpreted within the context of contemporary da'wah, and how communication ethics and local cultural values are reflected in the process. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research type and a qualitative content analysis design. Data were collected through documentation and archival analysis of the video content and digital sources. The findings reveal that the social meaning in Gus Miftah's da'wah shifts through an encoding-decoding mechanism, where the term "goblog" undergoes reinterpretation when transferred to the digital realm. His egalitarian and humorous discursive practice becomes problematic when faced with a culturally diverse virtual audience. The da'wah reflects tensions between local wisdom and the universal values of Islam. This study recommends the development of digital da'wah strategies that are more sensitive to audience diversity and emphasizes the need for reinterpretation of preaching methods that align with Islamic communication ethics in modern public spheres.

**Keywords:** *Social Representation, Communication Ethics, Contemporary Da'wah, Social Media, Content Analysis*

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## Introduction

Da'wah in the digital era has undergone a fundamental transformation in terms of message delivery, communication mediums, and the construction of social meaning. This phenomenon has not only altered the landscape of religious communication but also challenged traditional boundaries of communication ethics within the context of Islamic preaching. The advancement of information and communication technology, particularly social media, has opened new avenues for da'i (Islamic preachers) to reach wider audiences. However, it also presents significant challenges in maintaining the quality and ethical standards of da'wah messaging. The Qur'an, in Surah An-Nahl verse 125, emphasizes:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

"Call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is (rightly) guided." (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022)

This verse highlights the importance of wisdom and courteousness in da'wah communication (Shihab, 2018). It provides a normative foundation that da'wah should be delivered with hikmah (wisdom), which, according to the Tafsir Al-Misbah, is defined as "the ability to say the right thing at the right time in the right way" (Shihab, 2018). This context becomes particularly relevant when analyzing the phenomenon of contemporary da'wah communication, which often employs controversial or provocative approaches to attract public attention.

The viral phenomenon surrounding Gus Miftah's sermon video about the sweet iced tea seller case in November 2024 represents the complex dynamics of contemporary da'wah communication. The event took place during the Magelang Bersholawat gathering at Drh. Soepardi Field, Mungkid, Magelang, and illustrates how spontaneous interactions between a preacher and the public can trigger major controversies when recorded and disseminated through digital media. In the perspective of hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"Indeed, the believer is one who is sociable and with whom others can associate easily. There is no good in the one who is neither sociable nor approachable." (Narrated by Ahmad).

This hadith, according to the interpretation of Shaykh Abdul Muhsin Al-Abbad, emphasizes the importance of good character in interacting with others, including in the context of da'wah, which should reflect the noble values of Islam (Al-Abbad, 2019). However, the reality of this case reveals a gap between the normative ideals and the actual practices of da'wah communication in the field.

Stuart Hall's theory of social representation offers a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how meaning is constructed, disseminated, and interpreted within the context of contemporary da'wah communication. Hall argues that representation is not merely a reflection of reality, but an active process of meaning-making through language, symbols, and discursive practices (Hall in Sobur, 2019). In the context of da'wah, such representations are crucial because religious

messages not only convey information but also shape religious identities, social values, and public perceptions of Islam. When a preacher uses particular language or approaches, it not only reflects their personal style but also represents the values and norms they adhere to, as well as how they position themselves in relation to the community. In this context, the Qur'an in Surah Al-Ahzab verse 21 states:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَرًا

“Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow—for anyone who hopes in Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah often.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

According to Ibn Kathir’s tafsir, this verse affirms that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the ideal model in all aspects of life, including in communication and preaching (da’wah) (Ibn Kathir in Baidan, 2016).

Discursive practices in contemporary da’wah communication reveal a high level of complexity, especially when confronted with the dynamics of social media, which allows content to spread virally and massively. The case involving Gus Miftah and Sunhaji demonstrates how a communicative moment perceived locally as a humorous or casual interaction can escalate into national controversy when recorded, edited, and distributed through digital platforms.

This phenomenon reflects what Hall refers to as the “politics of representation” a concept describing how power operates within the process of meaning-making, and how meaning can shift depending on context and audience (Hall in Barker, 2014).

From an Islamic perspective, this issue relates closely to the concept of kalimah tayyibah (good speech), as mentioned in the Qur’an, Surah Ibrahim verse 24:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ

“Have you not considered how Allah presents an example? A good word is like a good tree its root is firmly fixed and its branches reach to the sky.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022)

According to Al-Tabari’s interpretation, a kalimah tayyibah (good word) refers to speech that brings benefit and does not cause harm to others (Al-Tabari in Nasution, 2017). This verse provides clear guidance that da’wah communication should produce positive and constructive impacts on society.

The cultural construction within da’wah communication cannot be separated from the socio-economic context of contemporary Indonesian society. The interaction between Gus Miftah and Sunhaji in the viral video reflects the complex dynamics of social class, where a prominent religious figure—who also serves as a Special Staff to the President—engages with a small-scale street vendor. From the hadith perspective, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever belittles a believer, Allah will belittle him in this world and in the Hereafter.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud)

This hadith, according to Shaykh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al-Albani, emphasizes the importance of honoring every individual regardless of their socio-economic status (Al-Albani in Shalih, 2020). This context becomes essential when analyzing the dynamics of da’wah communication within a society marked by clear social stratification.

The viral phenomenon on social media further illustrates how digital technology has transformed the landscape of contemporary da'wah. Social media is not merely a medium for disseminating messages but also a space where meanings are constructed, contested, and reconstructed by diverse actors. The dissemination process beginning from TikTok and spreading across multiple platforms demonstrates how content can undergo meaning transformation as it moves from one context to another. In the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat verse 6 states :

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ  
نُدِمِينَ

“O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022)

According to Ibn Kathir's tafsir, this verse teaches the importance of verifying information before disseminating it or making decisions based on it (Kathir in Hakim, 2018). This principle is especially relevant in the digital age, where information can be easily spread without adequate verification.

Islamic communication ethics also emphasize the necessity of considering the potential impact of every utterance and communicative act. In the context of da'wah, this not only relates to the content of the message but also to the method of delivery, timing, and the socio-cultural context in which communication takes place. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, as narrated by Imam Bukhari: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak what is good or remain silent.” According to Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, this hadith offers a fundamental guideline that every statement should be evaluated for its consequences before being expressed (Bin Baz in Fauzan, 2019). In the context of contemporary da'wah communication, this principle is increasingly crucial, considering the wide reach and significant impact of every communication especially when conveyed by influential religious figures.

The analysis of this case also underscores the importance of understanding local cultural contexts in da'wah communication. What may be perceived as humor or light-heartedness in Javanese culture might be interpreted differently when disseminated to a broader audience. This relates to the concept of “local wisdom” (kearifan lokal) in da'wah, which emphasizes the importance of respecting and understanding local cultural values while maintaining the core substance of the religious message. In the Qur'an, Surah Ar-Rum verse 22 states:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاخْتِلَافَ اَللِّسَانِ وَالْوَاوَاكُمُ اَللِّسَانِ فِي ذٰلِكَ لَاٰيٰتٍ لِّلْعٰلَمِيْنَ

“And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022)

According to Al-Qurtubi's tafsir, this verse highlights that linguistic and cultural diversity is part of Allah's divine will (sunnatullah), and thus must be respected and

understood within the context of human communication (Al-Qurtubi in Rahman, 2021).

This study is significant because it seeks to understand the phenomenon of contemporary da'wah communication within a broader framework not merely as an isolated incident, but as a representation of the ongoing social, cultural, and technological dynamics in Indonesian society. The public's varied responses to the viral video ranging from criticism to support and the subsequent reconciliation process reflect the complexity of interpretation and meaning in contemporary da'wah communication.

Through an in-depth analysis of the social representation and communication ethics within this case, this research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of da'wah in the digital era. It also seeks to provide insights into how Islamic preaching can be carried out effectively while upholding the ethical and moral values taught in Islam.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research design, as it aims to provide an in-depth depiction of how social representation and communication ethics are portrayed in contemporary da'wah through digital media. The chosen research design is qualitative content analysis, which allows the researcher to systematically and thoroughly examine both verbal and non-verbal messages in the da'wah video. This approach is deemed appropriate because it aligns with the focus on meaning and social construction, as explained in Stuart Hall's theory of representation. As stated by Bungin (2017) in *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, this approach helps researchers uncover the hidden meanings behind symbols, language, and narratives used in communication media.

The primary data source in this research is a video of Gus Miftah's sermon uploaded through the official TikTok account @kaltengundercover on November 25, 2024. This video serves as the main object containing da'wah messages to be analyzed. The selection of this video is based on its direct relevance to an actual and viral social event, making it suitable for analysis from the perspective of representation and communication ethics. Meanwhile, secondary data sources include supporting documents such as news articles from Detikcom that report on the chronology and public response to the case—especially the article titled “Viral: Gus Miftah Mocking a Sweet Iced Tea Seller”, published on December 3, 2024. These secondary sources are crucial in enriching the social context of the da'wah content and in understanding the impact of the message on the audience. According to Moleong (2019), triangulation of primary and secondary data is necessary in qualitative research to gain a holistic and in-depth understanding.

Data collection techniques include documentation and note-taking on the video content as well as digital archives such as news articles. The researcher records and codes key messages from the video and news texts for further analysis. To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, the researcher applies source and theoretical triangulation, as well as peer debriefing, as recommended by Sugiyono (2017) in *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan R&D*.

The data analysis technique used is Krippendorff's model of qualitative content analysis, which includes the following stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In this analysis, the researcher identifies elements of

representation (subject, object, cultural values) and communication ethics that emerge, and interprets how both are constructed within Gus Miftah’s da’wah messages. This step aligns with Krippendorff’s view (in Kridalaksana, 2015) that qualitative content analysis is effective in examining the symbolic and ideological meanings embedded in media messages.

## Results and Discussion

### Constructing Social Meaning in Gus Miftah’s Da’wah Video on the Sweet Iced Tea Vendor Controversy



**Figure 1. Screenshot of Gus Miftah’s Sermon Video on TikTok**

(Source: TikTok account @kaltengundercover – <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSH5AWDQ9/>)

Based on the analysis of the viral video featuring Gus Miftah’s interaction with a sweet iced tea vendor named Sunhaji during the Magelang Bersholawat event on November 20, 2024, the process of social meaning construction unfolds through a complex mechanism. According to Stuart Hall’s theory of representation (1997) as cited in Sobur (2019), representation as meaning refers to how a text or communicative event can generate diverse interpretations depending on the audience’s social and cultural context.

In this case, the expression “Still? Then keep selling it, idiot!” (“Masih? Ya kono didol, goblog!”) uttered by Gus Miftah produces two contradictory layers of meaning. On one hand, the literal meaning within the context of the event indicates that the statement was intended as a spontaneous joke to lighten the atmosphere, as evidenced by the laughter of the audience present. On the other hand, when the video circulated on social media, the meaning shifted into a negative representation of a religious figure’s communication ethics.

This transformation of meaning aligns with Hall’s concept of encoding and decoding, in which a message encoded by the communicator can be decoded differently by the audience. The attendees at the event decoded the message through

the frame of humor and personal closeness, while online viewers (netizens) decoded it through the frame of moral expectations and public ethics applied to religious figures. This indicates that in the digital era, da'wah is no longer confined to a live audience but must also take into account the virtual audience, who may hold different expectations and evaluative standards.

From the Qur'anic perspective, the process of meaning-making in da'wah communication must adhere to the principle outlined in Surah Al-Isra, verse 53:

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا

“Tell My servants to say that which is best. Indeed, Satan induces dissension among them. Indeed, Satan is ever, to mankind, a clear enemy.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022)

According to Ibn Kathir's Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azhim, as translated by Bahrn Abu Bakar (2015), the word “ahsan” in this verse implies the selection of words that are not only correct in substance but also beautiful and courteous in their delivery. This affirms that in Islam, the process of meaning construction through communication must take into account the social and psychological impact on the audience.

### Discursive Practices in Gus Miftah's Da'wah Message Delivery



**Figure 2. Netizen Comments on TikTok**  
(Source: TikTok account @kaltengundercover – <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSH5AWDQ9/>)

The analysis of discursive practices, according to Hall's framework, reveals how language choices, communication styles, and delivery strategies construct specific discourses within the public sphere. Gus Miftah adopts an egalitarian communication approach infused with popular humor, utilizing Javanese dialect and everyday language to foster a sense of closeness with his audience. This strategy represents a form of contemporary da'wah adaptation that seeks to eliminate hierarchical distance between the da'i (preacher) and the jama'ah (audience).

However, this discursive practice faces challenges in the context of social media, which differs significantly from face-to-face communication. The use of the word "goblog" which in Javanese culture may be accepted as a form of affectionate humor

undergoes recontextualization when transferred into the digital space, where audiences are more culturally heterogeneous. This highlights that discursive da'wah practices in digital settings require greater sensitivity to differences in communication context.

According to Rahmat (2018), in his study on digital da'wah communication, the shift from offline to online media requires preachers to understand the characteristics of digital audiences, who tend to be more critical and hold higher expectations regarding communication ethics. Effective discursive practices in digital da'wah must therefore consider the universality of the message without compromising the personal authenticity of the preacher.

From the perspective of hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provided a relevant guideline for communication: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak what is good or remain silent." (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim) Shaykh Muhammad bin Salih Al-Uthaymeen, in *Sharh Riyadh al-Salihin* as translated by Fauzi (2016), explains that this hadith emphasizes the importance of selectivity in speech, whereby every utterance should pass through a filter of goodness before being expressed. This implies that discursive practices in da'wah must prioritize public benefit (*maslahah*) and avoid potential harm (*maḍarat*), especially in the digital context, where messages have a broader reach and longer lifespan.

### Constructing Cultural, Ethical, and Religious Meanings in Contemporary Islamic Preaching



**Figure 3. Detikcom News Coverage on the Controversy**  
(Source: Detikcom News, December 3, 2024)

The third dimension of Hall's theory of representation meaning as a product of cultural construction is clearly reflected in how Gus Miftah's video became an arena for the contestation of cultural, ethical, and religious values in contemporary Indonesian society. The controversy highlights a tension between the tradition of

humorous communication in Javanese culture and modern expectations toward public figures, especially religious leaders.

The cultural construction of meaning in this case illustrates a negotiation process between locality and globality in digital da'wah. On one hand, Gus Miftah seeks to preserve Javanese local wisdom in communication, which emphasizes closeness and humor as tools for preaching. On the other hand, digital audiences demand more universal and formal standards of communication aligned with modern values of respect and dignity.

According to Nasution (2019), in his research on the transformation of da'wah in the digital age, the construction of meaning in contemporary da'wah is influenced by cultural hybridity, where traditional values intersect with modern expectations. This creates complexity in delivering religious messages that must be acceptable to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. From the perspective of Islamic ethics, the construction of meaning in da'wah communication must be guided by the principle outlined in Surah An-Nahl, verse 125:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ  
ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

“Invite [all] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022)

According to Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab (2018), the word “*hikmah*” (wisdom) in this verse implies the importance of wisely choosing da'wah methods that align with the conditions and characteristics of the audience. Meanwhile, “*mau'izah hasanah*” (good instruction) emphasizes the necessity of delivering messages in a manner that neither offends nor degrades others' dignity.

The construction of meaning in Gus Miftah's da'wah highlights the need for a reinterpretation of preaching methods that can accommodate diverse audiences within the digital space. This aligns with the concept of contextual da'wah as proposed by Aziz (2020), which calls upon preachers to understand the social, cultural, and technological contexts when delivering religious messages, so as to avoid distortion of meaning that could undermine the goals of da'wah itself.

In sum, the analysis of social representation and communication ethics in Gus Miftah's contemporary da'wah reveals the complexity of communication in the digital age, which requires a careful balance between authenticity, effectiveness, and ethical standards. Digital da'wah is not merely about technological adaptation, but also about the transformation of communicative approaches that can bridge local values with the universality of Islamic teachings in a modern, pluralistic society.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of social representation and communication ethics in the viral video of Gus Miftah concerning the sweet iced tea vendor case, it can be concluded that the process of social meaning construction occurs through a complex encoding–decoding mechanism. The expression “goblog” undergoes a transformation of meaning from a contextual joke to a negative representation as it shifts from the

physical space to the digital space. This highlights that contemporary da'wah must consider the virtual audience, which operates under different evaluative standards.

The discursive practice employed by Gus Miftah utilizes an egalitarian approach through Javanese dialect and popular humor to foster closeness with the audience. However, it faces the challenge of recontextualization in social media, which demands greater sensitivity to the cultural diversity of audiences and to more universal expectations of communication ethics.

Meanwhile, the cultural, ethical, and religious construction of meaning in the da'wah reflects a tension between Javanese local wisdom and modern expectations, as the controversy reveals the need to reinterpret preaching methods that can accommodate cultural hybridity within digital spaces while still upholding Islamic principles of wise and respectful communication, as emphasized in the concept of da'wah bil hikmah wal mau'izah hasanah.

Thus, digital da'wah is not merely about technological adaptation but also about the transformation of communication approaches that bridge locality and the universality of Islamic values in a modern, pluralistic society.

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