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PROPHETIC COMMUNICATION IN DIGITAL DA'WAH: A CASE STUDY OF USTAZ HANDY BONNY'S INSTAGRAM CONTENT

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the prophetic communication approach applied in Ustaz Handy Bonny's da'wah content on Instagram, which has attracted significant attention among young Muslim audiences. The research addresses three main questions: why prophetic communication is essential in the context of digital da'wah, how the six qaulan principles (qaulan sadiidan, qaulan balighan, qaulan maysuuran, qaulan layyinan, qaulan kariiman, and qaulan ma'ruufan) are implemented, and what forms and content of da'wah reflect these values. Using a qualitative method with a case study approach, the research employed in-depth interviews with Ustaz Handy Bonny, his media team, followers, and experts, along with observation of his Instagram content. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model (reduction, display, conclusion) and triangulation for credibility. The findings show that Ustaz Handy Bonny's da'wah reflects prophetic communication by combining clarity, emotional appeal, and ethical language, while addressing contemporary youth issues such as relationships, mental health, and spiritual awareness. However, critiques arise regarding the use of slang language, questions of credibility as a 'hijrah ustaz', and challenges in maintaining prophetic standards in a commercialized digital space. This study contributes to the development of Islamic communication by showing that prophetic communication provides an ethical and transformative framework for digital da'wah, balancing between popularity and spiritual depth.

Keywords: Prophetic communication, digital da'wah, Instagram, six qaulan

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pendekatan komunikasi nabawi yang diterapkan dalam konten dakwah Ustaz Handy Bonny di Instagram, yang telah menarik perhatian signifikan di kalangan audiens Muslim muda. Penelitian ini menjawab tiga pertanyaan utama: mengapa komunikasi nabawi penting dalam konteks dakwah digital, bagaimana enam prinsip qaulan (qaulan sadiidan, qaulan balighan, qaulan maysuuran, qaulan layyinan, qaulan kariiman, dan qaulan ma'ruufan) diterapkan, serta bentuk dan konten dakwah apa yang mencerminkan nilai-nilai tersebut. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan wawancara mendalam dengan Ustaz Handy Bonny, tim medianya, pengikutnya, dan para ahli, serta pengamatan terhadap konten Instagramnya. Analisis data mengikuti model interaktif Miles dan Huberman (reduksi, tampilan, kesimpulan) dan triangulasi untuk kredibilitas.

Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dakwah Ustaz Handy Bonny mencerminkan komunikasi nabawi dengan menggabungkan kejelasan, daya tarik emosional, dan bahasa etis, sambil menangani isu-isu kontemporer pemuda seperti hubungan, kesehatan mental, dan kesadaran spiritual. Namun, kritik muncul terkait penggunaan bahasa slang, pertanyaan tentang kredibilitas sebagai 'ustaz hijrah', dan tantangan dalam mempertahankan standar kenabian di ruang digital yang komersial. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan komunikasi Islam dengan menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi kenabian menyediakan kerangka etis dan transformatif untuk da'wah digital, menyeimbangkan antara popularitas dan kedalaman spiritual.

Kata kunci: Komunikasi kenabian, da'wah digital, Instagram, enam qaulan

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed communication patterns in modern society, including the domain of religious preaching (dakwah). Social media platforms have shifted from being spaces of entertainment and networking to becoming significant venues for religious learning and spiritual transformation. In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, this phenomenon is particularly visible. Millions of young Muslims actively engage with religious content distributed via Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and other platforms, indicating that digital dakwah has become both a cultural trend and a socio-religious necessity. This study focuses on Instagram as a central medium of digital preaching due to its visual orientation, interactivity, and popularity among millennial and Generation Z users.

Religious communication in digital media is not only a matter of disseminating Islamic knowledge but also of negotiating credibility, authority, and relevance. The emergence of "ustaz hijrah" reflects a shift in the perception of religious figures. Unlike traditional preachers from pesantren or Islamic universities, ustaz hijrah often emerge from non-formal educational pathways, combining personal experiences, self-study, and digital skills to reach wide audiences. Ustaz Handy Bonny represents this phenomenon. With a background in communication studies and non-formal religious training through talakki with various teachers, Handy Bonny has built his preaching career primarily in digital spaces. His Instagram account has become a platform for engaging young audiences through short videos (Reels), carousel explanations, motivational captions, and visual quotes. His messages focus on themes such as hijrah, relationships, mental health, repentance, and everyday struggles, making him relatable to his followers.

Scholars have begun to analyze this digital dakwah phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Rahma et al., 2024). investigated code-switching in Handy Bonny's preaching and found that he frequently mixes languages and registers to maintain closeness with his audience (Ramdani, 2022). examined the effectiveness of his Instagram content in motivating youth in Lampung, demonstrating that digital videos were effective in strengthening religious awareness and behavior. (Suswita & Ilmi, 2023) studied his rhetoric on YouTube, highlighting the role of casual language, gestures, and modern fashion in attracting youth audiences (Handayani, 2023). explored his televised preaching and identified core messages of aqidah, sharia, and akhlaq delivered in a simplified and emotionally engaging style (Hafiz, 2019). analyzed his anti-dating

campaign on Instagram and emphasized the use of Qur'anic and Hadith references to construct moral arguments.

While these studies provide valuable insights, they remain limited in scope. Most of them focus on linguistic aspects, rhetorical strategies, or specific themes of his dakwah. Few attempts have been made to assess whether his communication practices align with the normative model of prophetic communication (*komunikasi profetik*), which is deeply rooted in the Qur'an. Prophetic communication consists of six principles of *qaulan sadiidan* (truthful), *balighan* (impactful), *maysuran* (easy), *layyinan* (gentle), *kariiman* (noble), and *ma'rufan* (appropriate) that represent a comprehensive ethical framework for delivering religious messages. The novelty of this study lies in filling this analytical gap. Previous research has not explicitly examined Handy Bonny's Instagram content through the lens of prophetic communication. Given the ethical and spiritual foundations of dakwah, it is crucial to evaluate whether the six *qaulan* principles are embodied in contemporary digital preaching. This approach not only addresses the effectiveness of communication but also its authenticity, ethical quality, and alignment with Islamic values.

Additionally, Handy Bonny's preaching raises critical questions about credibility and authority. As a preacher labeled "ustaz hijrah," his legitimacy has been debated. Critics argue that his reliance on colloquial expressions, such as the viral term *cuaks*, risks trivializing Islamic teachings and creating ambiguity. Others question whether his non-formal educational background is sufficient to justify the title "ustaz." Furthermore, issues of commercialization and professionalism in digital dakwah such as monetization, sponsorships, and honoraria have sparked debates about whether digital preachers can balance sincerity, financial sustainability, and spiritual integrity. By incorporating these criticisms, this study avoids producing a one-sided or overly subjective analysis. Instead, it critically evaluates both the strengths and weaknesses of Handy Bonny's digital preaching. This balanced perspective contributes to the originality of the research, ensuring that it goes beyond merely describing the phenomenon and instead provides an ethical and theoretical evaluation grounded in prophetic communication.

Based on the background and research gap, this article has three main objectives. First, it seeks to explain why prophetic communication is a relevant and necessary framework for analyzing digital dakwah on Instagram. Second, it examines how the six principles of *qaulan* are reflected in Handy Bonny's Instagram content, covering various formats such as Reels, carousel posts, and captions. Third, it explores the challenges, criticisms, and limitations of his preaching, particularly in relation to credibility, the use of colloquial language, and the tension between communication effectiveness and prophetic ethics. By achieving these objectives, the study aims to contribute theoretically by applying prophetic communication to digital preaching, and practically by offering insights for preachers, audiences, and scholars to strengthen the ethical foundation of dakwah in social media environments. This contribution is significant in ensuring that Islamic preaching remains transformative, relevant, and authentic in the midst of the complex dynamics of the digital age.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative research method with a case study design to explore the implementation of prophetic communication in the digital preaching (dakwah) of Ustaz Handy Bonny through Instagram. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research lies in understanding meaning, interpretation, and the lived experiences of both the preacher and his audiences, rather than measuring numerical variables. According to (Creswell, 2013), qualitative research is appropriate for exploring social phenomena in depth, especially when the aim is to uncover contextual practices and subjective interpretations. The research employed a descriptive case study, which allowed the researcher to investigate the preaching activities of a specific figure Ustaz Handy Bonny as a bounded case. The case study approach was considered suitable since it emphasizes real-life contexts and enables the researcher to examine complex interactions between communication style, content, and audience responses (Sugiyono, 2013).

The research was conducted at the residence of Ustaz Handy Bonny in Kopo Permai, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, which also serves as the center of the Majelis Satu Rasa. This location was selected because it represents the main site of his religious activities, community gatherings, and content production for digital dakwah. Observations and data collection were carried out between January 2024 and July 2024, covering the period before and after the defense of the initial research draft, in order to capture comprehensive insights. The primary subject of this study was Ustaz Handy Bonny, who is actively producing dakwah content on Instagram. In addition, several supporting informants were included to provide multiple perspectives and triangulate the findings: Ustaz Rijal, manager and collaborator of Ustaz Handy Bonny. Prof. Dr. H. M. Abdurrahman, M.A., an expert in Islamic communication and dakwah studies. Najmah Zahirah, Frisca Asterina, and Farhan Bintang, active followers and participants in Handy Bonny's digital preaching.

The informants were selected purposively, based on their direct involvement or expertise related to the research focus. Data collection involved four primary techniques to ensure rich and valid information:

1. Participant Observation

The researcher actively engaged in observing Ustaz Handy Bonny's Instagram content, particularly Reels, carousel posts, quotes, and captions. Field notes were also recorded during community gatherings at his residence. Observations focused on identifying communication patterns, language style, visual presentation, and audience engagement.

2. In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Ustaz Handy Bonny, Ustaz Rijal, Prof. Abdurrahman, and selected followers. The interviews aimed to uncover the preacher's background, motivations, communication strategies, challenges, and perceptions of prophetic communication. Interviews were carried out face-to-face and via digital platforms (e.g., WhatsApp), recorded in audio format, and later transcribed verbatim.

3. Documentation

Supporting documents, such as Instagram posts, digital flyers, video transcripts, and relevant academic literature, were collected. These documents provided additional evidence for triangulating findings.

4. Literature Review

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, secondary data were collected from academic journals, books, and previous research published within the last ten years, particularly those addressing digital dakwah, prophetic communication, and Islamic social media practices.

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model, which consists of three stages:

1. **Data Reduction:** selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data from observations, interviews, and documents into meaningful categories.
2. **Data Display:** presenting organized data in the form of narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic coding tables to identify patterns of prophetic communication.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** interpreting findings to confirm the presence of the six qaulan principles, while considering both supportive evidence and criticisms.

To ensure data credibility, this study employed triangulation of sources and techniques. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing insights from Ustaz Handy Bonny, his manager, academic experts, and followers. Technique triangulation was applied by cross-checking findings from observation, interviews, and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by returning interview transcripts and interpretations to the informants to validate accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at the residence of Ustaz Handy Bonny in Kopo Permai, Bandung, which also serves as the center of Majelis Satu Rasa. The study focused on his Instagram account as the main platform for digital dakwah. The results are presented in the following categories:

1. Forms of Content

Based on participant observation, Ustaz Handy Bonny's Instagram content consists of Reels (short videos), Carousels (slide images), Quotes, and extended Captions. Each format delivers Islamic messages with different emphasis—Reels prioritize visual and emotional impact, Carousels provide structured explanations, while Quotes and Captions highlight short reflective messages.

2. Content Themes

The dominant themes include hijrah, relationships between men and women, tawakkal (trust in Allah), mental health, istighfar (repentance), and istiqamah (steadfastness). These themes are tailored to resonate with the everyday struggles of young audiences.

3. Application of Prophetic Communication (Qaulan Principles)

Analysis of more than 20 posts reveals clear application of the six principles of prophetic communication: Qaulan Sadiidan (truthful speech) → use of Quranic verses and hadith in captions. Qaulan Balighan (effective speech) → emotionally moving expressions such as “Tenang aja, Allah yang atur.” Qaulan Maysuuran (easy speech) → simple diction and slang terms like “cuaks.” Qaulan Layyinan (gentle speech) → empathetic tone when discussing sensitive topics such as sin and repentance. Qaulan Kariiman (noble speech) → respectful admonitions regarding gossip and exposing others’ faults. Qaulan Ma’rufan (kind speech) → universal messages of kindness that transcend specific groups.

4. Followers’ Perspectives

Interviews with followers (Najmah Zahirah, Frisca Asterina, Farhan Bintang) revealed that the content feels personal, comforting, and transformative. Several followers reported an increased awareness of Islamic values and even significant lifestyle changes.

5. Challenges and Criticism

Despite its popularity, the style of preaching also received criticism. The use of slang terms like “cuaks” was seen by some as too casual for religious preaching, potentially leading to misinterpretation. Moreover, questions were raised about Ustadz Handy Bonny’s credibility, since his educational background is in communication rather than formal Islamic institutions. He himself acknowledges these challenges, describing his role as a “bridge” between those with little religious knowledge and deeper Islamic scholars.

Table 1. Forms and Themes of Instagram Content of Ustadz Handy Bonny

Content Form	Example Theme	Communication Style	Qaulan Principle Reflected
Reels	Tawakkal & Mental Health	Short phrases, emotional narration, background music	Qaulan Balighan, Layyinan
Carousel	Hijrah & Istiqamah	Structured slides, concise explanation	Qaulan Sadiidan, Maysuuran
Quote Posts	Motivation & Repentance	One-liner text with visual design	Qaulan Ma’rufan, Kariiman
Caption	Relationship advice, Self-reflection	Long text with Quranic verses & hadith support	Qaulan Sadiidan, Balighan

DISCUSSION

The development of digital media has brought significant changes to Islamic preaching practices. The transformation of communication technology, especially through social media such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, allows religious messages to be

conveyed more widely, quickly, and interactively. In this context, preachers are required to be able to adapt their communication methods to the characteristics of digital audiences who tend to prefer messages that are short, visual, and emotional. This phenomenon has given rise to various models of digital preaching that rely not only on scholarly authority but also on creative communication. One figure who stands out in the practice of digital preaching in Indonesia is Ustaz Handy Bonny, who is known for actively delivering Islamic messages through social media with an approach that is close to the younger generation.

The findings of this study show that Ustaz Handy Bonny has successfully integrated the concept of prophetic communication into digital da'wah practices. Prophetic communication in Islamic tradition refers to a communication pattern that emulates the methods of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, which emphasizes the values of truth, honesty, gentleness, and wisdom in delivering messages. In the Qur'an, this principle of communication is often referred to through the concept of *qaulan*, such as *qaulan sadidan* (truthful words), *qaulan layyinan* (gentle words), *qaulan balighan* (effective words), and *qaulan maysuuran* (easy-to-understand words). These principles serve as ethical guidelines in Islamic communication that emphasize the importance of harmony between the message, the method of delivery, and moral values (Hidayatullah, 2017).

In his da'wah practice on social media, Ustaz Handy Bonny utilizes simple language, emotional narratives, and a communication style that is close to the daily lives of the younger generation. This approach makes Islamic messages easier to understand for audiences who are accustomed to fast-paced and visual digital content. The language used is often not too formal, sometimes even utilizing popular terms or slang that are familiar to young people. This kind of communication strategy shows an adaptation to the digital culture that is developing in society. This is in line with Syahputra's (2019) findings, which state that prophetic communication in digital media serves as a means of transforming values that not only influence individual behavior but are also capable of forming new social structures in digital society. Furthermore, an empathetic and persuasive communication approach is also a hallmark of the digital da'wah carried out by Ustaz Handy Bonny.

The use of emotional narratives is often associated with personal experiences, inspirational stories, and reflections on life that are close to the audience's reality. This method not only conveys religious messages cognitively but also touches the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the audience. In the context of da'wah communication, this approach is considered effective because it is able to build psychological closeness between the preacher and the audience. Istikomah (2021) emphasizes that the use of gentle, empathetic, and respectful language is an important factor in the success of preaching in the digital space. Friendly and non-judgmental language allows religious messages to be more widely accepted by people from diverse social and religious backgrounds.

In addition, the use of social media as a platform for preaching also allows for more dynamic interaction between preachers and audiences. Unlike conventional preaching

models, which are usually one-way, digital preaching opens up space for dialogue through comments, direct messages, and other interactive features. This interaction allows the audience to convey questions, experiences, and personal reflections related to the preaching message. Thus, digital preaching not only functions as a means of conveying messages but also as a space for forming a spiritual community that supports each other in the process of hijrah or self-transformation. However, this study also found a number of critical issues that distinguish its findings from previous studies. Most studies on digital dakwah tend to highlight the success of preachers in reaching a wide audience through social media. However, this study shows that this success is also accompanied by various challenges and criticisms from the community.

One of the most prominent issues is the use of slang in da'wah, which some consider to be a simplification of religious messages. The use of popular language or slang in da'wah can actually be understood as a communication strategy to bring religious messages closer to young audiences. In the concept of Islamic communication, this can be linked to the principle of *qaulan maysuuran*, which is the use of language that is easily understood by listeners. However, in practice, the use of this kind of language has also sparked debate about the limits of prophetic communication in digital preaching. Some people believe that the use of overly casual language has the potential to reduce the sacredness of religious messages or even cause misunderstandings in understanding Islamic teachings.

This finding is in line with Ramdani's (2022) view that digital da'wah needs to maintain a balance between emotional appeal and Islamic communication ethics. Preachers are not only required to be able to attract the audience's attention, but also to ensure that the messages conveyed remain in accordance with the principles of sharia and do not lead to an excessive simplification of religious teachings. In other words, popularity in digital da'wah must be balanced with moral and intellectual responsibility in conveying Islamic teachings correctly.

Apart from language issues, another issue that emerged in this study was related to the credibility of preachers. In Islamic tradition, religious authority is usually built through formal education in Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, or other Islamic educational institutions. However, the phenomenon of digital da'wah shows that the popularity of a preacher is not always determined by their formal educational background, but also by their communication skills and mastery of social media. Ustaz Handy Bonny himself is known to have an educational background in communication and gained his religious understanding through informal learning processes such as *talakki* with various ustaz. This condition has led some people to label preachers who do not come from an Islamic boarding school educational background as “ustaz hijrah” (migrant preachers). This label reflects a new phenomenon in digital preaching, where religious authority is no longer solely determined by traditional academic structures, but also by media influence and popularity in the digital public sphere.

This phenomenon indicates a paradigm shift in understanding religious authority in the digital age. On the one hand, a non-pesantren background can be an advantage in reaching audiences who are undergoing a process of spiritual search or hijrah. Preachers with a

more “general” background are often considered more relatable by audiences who have similar life experiences. This makes the message of preaching feel more personal and relevant to everyday life. However, on the other hand, this condition also raises questions about the depth of knowledge and legitimacy of religious authority in conveying Islamic teachings. Discussions about this credibility show that there is tension between popularity and scholarly authority in digital preaching. In the context of mass communication, popularity is often an indicator of successful communication because it shows the ability to reach a wide audience. However, in the context of Islamic preaching, popularity alone is not enough because preaching is also related to moral and intellectual responsibility in conveying religious teachings correctly. Therefore, digital preachers need to continue to improve their scientific competence and maintain integrity in conveying religious messages. From a theoretical perspective, this study shows that prophetic communication has an important role in maintaining the ethics of preaching in the digital age.

The principles of prophetic communication provide moral guidelines that can help preachers navigate various communication challenges on social media. Values such as honesty, gentleness, wisdom, and moral responsibility are important foundations in ensuring that digital preaching remains oriented towards spiritual and social goals. However, this study also shows that the application of these principles in social media does not always run ideally. Social media has characteristics that are different from traditional da'wah communication, especially in terms of the speed of information dissemination, the openness of the discussion space, and the possibility of criticism or controversy. In the digital space, da'wah messages can be easily cut, misunderstood, or interpreted differently by various audience groups.

Therefore, digital preachers need to have good media literacy skills in order to manage communication effectively in the digital space. Media literacy is not only related to the ability to use technology, but also includes an understanding of the dynamics of digital communication, audience behavior, and the potential risks that can arise from the use of social media. With good media literacy, preachers can utilize social media more strategically to spread positive and constructive religious messages.

Overall, this study shows that the digital preaching carried out by Ustaz Handy Bonny on Instagram is able to meet the community's need for Islamic content that is easily accessible, empathetic, and relevant to the lives of the younger generation. The simple and emotional communication approach makes the preaching messages more easily accepted by audiences who live in a fast-paced and visual digital culture. However, this success is also accompanied by various challenges that need to be continuously reflected upon, especially regarding the use of language, the credibility of the preacher, and the balance between popular communication styles and prophetic communication ethics.

Thus, this study confirms that prophetic communication in digital preaching has two sides, namely as a force that can increase the effectiveness of preaching communication and as a challenge that requires critical reflection in its application. The principles of prophetic communication remain relevant as an ethical foundation in digital preaching, but their implementation needs to be adapted to the characteristics of social media and

the ever-evolving needs of the audience. Digital preachers need to maintain a balance between creativity in communication, depth of knowledge, and moral integrity so that preaching in the digital age can make a positive contribution to the spiritual and social development of society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of prophetic communication in Ustaz Handy Bonny's Instagram content reflects a balance between ethical, spiritual, and communicative values that are rooted in Islamic teachings. The application of the six principles of qaulan sadiidan, baliighan, maysuuran, layyinan, kariiman, and ma'rufan demonstrates how digital da'wah can remain authentic while adapting to the needs of younger audiences who are more receptive to relatable and emotionally engaging messages. The research highlights that his content does not only inform but also provides spiritual reflection and emotional affirmation, thereby fostering religious transformation among followers. However, challenges remain regarding the credibility and label of "ustaz hijrah," the potential controversy surrounding the use of colloquial expressions, and the difficulty of ensuring consistency with prophetic standards in a fast-paced digital environment.

The limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single case study, which may restrict the generalization of findings to broader contexts of digital da'wah. Further research could explore comparative analyses with other da'i or Islamic preachers to better understand diverse communication strategies and their effects on audiences. Future studies may also employ quantitative approaches to measure the long-term spiritual and psychological impact of prophetic communication on digital communities. Finally, the researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to Ustaz Handy Bonny, Ustaz Rijal, Prof. Dr. H. M. Abdurrahman, M.A., and the informants who willingly contributed valuable insights, as well as to the academic supervisors who guided this research process.

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