

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

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Abstract

This study examines how prophetic communication is articulated in the Instagram-based da'wah of Ustaz Handy Bonny, with particular attention to six Qur'anic communication principles: qaulan sadiidan, qaulan baliighan, qaulan maysuuran, qaulan layyinan, qaulan kariiman, and qaulan ma'ruufan. The study responds to a gap in previous research, which has largely examined Handy Bonny's language, rhetoric, or thematic content without systematically connecting these practices to an ethical framework of prophetic communication. A qualitative case-study design was employed. Data were collected through participant observation of Instagram content, semi-structured interviews with the preacher, his manager/collaborator, an Islamic communication expert, and selected followers, together with documentation and relevant literature. Data were analyzed through iterative reduction, display, thematic interpretation, and verification, supported by source and technique triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that the six principles are manifested differently across Reels, carousel posts, quote posts, and extended captions. Qur'anic and hadith references support qaulan sadiidan; emotionally resonant and concise formulations support qaulan baliighan; accessible diction and colloquial expressions support qaulan maysuuran; empathetic treatment of sensitive issues reflects qaulan layyinan; respectful moral guidance reflects qaulan kariiman; and inclusive messages of kindness reflect qaulan ma'ruufan. At the same time, the case reveals tensions between accessibility and religious precision, digital popularity and religious authority, and communicative effectiveness and prophetic ethics. The study therefore conceptualizes prophetic digital da'wah not as the simple transfer of classical preaching into social media, but as an ongoing negotiation between ethical norms, platform affordances, audience expectations, and authority. The study contributes to Islamic communication scholarship by providing an ethically grounded framework for evaluating digital da'wah.

Keywords: prophetic communication, digital da'wah, Instagram, qaulan, religious authority, digital religion

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana komunikasi profetik diwujudkan dalam dakwah berbasis Instagram yang dilakukan oleh Ustaz Handy Bonny, dengan memberikan perhatian khusus pada enam prinsip komunikasi Qur'ani, yaitu qaulan sadiidan, qaulan

baliighan, qaulan maysuuran, qaulan layyinan, qaulan kariiman, dan qaulan ma 'ruufan. Penelitian ini merespons kesenjangan dalam penelitian terdahulu yang sebagian besar mengkaji bahasa, retorika, atau konten tematik dakwah Handy Bonny tanpa menghubungkan praktik tersebut secara sistematis dengan kerangka etis komunikasi profetik. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif terhadap konten Instagram, wawancara semiterstruktur dengan pendakwah, manajer/kolaboratornya, seorang ahli komunikasi Islam, serta beberapa pengikut, yang dilengkapi dengan dokumentasi dan kajian literatur yang relevan. Data dianalisis melalui proses reduksi, penyajian data, interpretasi tematik, dan verifikasi secara iteratif, dengan didukung oleh triangulasi sumber dan teknik serta member checking. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keenam prinsip tersebut diwujudkan secara berbeda dalam berbagai bentuk konten, seperti Reels, unggahan carousel, unggahan kutipan, dan keterangan (caption) yang lebih panjang. Rujukan Al-Qur'an dan hadis mendukung penerapan qaulan sadiidan; formulasi yang singkat dan memiliki resonansi emosional mendukung qaulan baliighan; penggunaan diksi yang mudah dipahami dan ungkapan kolokial mencerminkan qaulan maysuuran; penyampaian yang empatik terhadap isu-isu sensitif merefleksikan qaulan layyinan; bimbingan moral yang disampaikan secara santun mencerminkan qaulan kariiman; sedangkan pesan-pesan inklusif mengenai kebaikan merepresentasikan qaulan ma 'ruufan. Pada saat yang sama, studi kasus ini mengungkap adanya ketegangan antara aksesibilitas dan ketepatan keagamaan, popularitas digital dan otoritas keagamaan, serta efektivitas komunikasi dan etika profetik. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini mengonseptualisasikan dakwah digital profetik bukan sebagai sekadar pemindahan praktik dakwah klasik ke media sosial, melainkan sebagai proses negosiasi yang berkelanjutan antara norma-norma etis, affordance platform, ekspektasi audiens, dan otoritas keagamaan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap kajian komunikasi Islam dengan menawarkan kerangka yang berlandaskan etika untuk mengevaluasi praktik dakwah digital.

Kata kunci: komunikasi profetik, dakwah digital, Instagram, qaulan, otoritas keagamaan, agama digital

INTRODUCTION

Digital media have transformed the conditions under which religious knowledge is produced, circulated, encountered, and evaluated. Social media platforms increasingly function not merely as channels for distributing religious messages but as environments in which religious practices, identities, communities, and forms of authority are negotiated. Scholarship on digital religion demonstrates that religious communication online is shaped by platform affordances, participation, and interaction between online and offline practices (Campbell, 2013; Campbell & Tsuria, 2022; Hjarvard, 2016). In Indonesia, this transformation is particularly visible in the growth of digitally mediated Islamic learning and preaching. Muslims increasingly use social media to encounter sermons, Qur'anic interpretations, motivational messages, and religious discussions outside conventional institutional settings (Slama, 2018; Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020).

The transformation is especially consequential for young Muslims because platforms such as Instagram combine visual communication, short-form video, algorithmic discovery, interaction, and personal branding. Instagram creates a communicative environment in which a preacher is evaluated not only through message content but also through presentation, relatability, interaction, and perceived authenticity. Research on

Indonesian Muslim social media practices has shown that digital platforms can become spaces for religious learning, identity formation, piety, and community building (Nisa, 2018; Slama, 2018). At the same time, digitalization can fragment religious authority because visibility and audience engagement may become additional sources of legitimacy alongside formal scholarly credentials (Bunt, 2018; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003).

Ustaz Handy Bonny provides a relevant case for examining this transformation. The source study describes him as a digitally oriented preacher whose Instagram content addresses hijrah, relationships, repentance, mental health, tawakkal, and everyday struggles. His content includes Reels, carousel posts, motivational quotes, and extended captions. Earlier studies examined specific dimensions of his communication: Rahma et al. (2024) examined code-switching; Ramdani (2022) investigated Instagram messages among youth in Lampung; Suswita and Ilmi (2023) analyzed his YouTube rhetoric; Handayani (2023) examined televised preaching; and Hafiz (2019) analyzed his anti-dating campaign on Instagram. These studies establish the relevance of Handy Bonny as a case of contemporary Indonesian digital da'wah, but they do not systematically evaluate the ethical structure of his communication.

This study addresses that gap through prophetic communication. The six qaulan categories are operationalized from Qur'anic expressions concerning truthful speech (qaulan sadiidan; Qur'an 33:70), effective speech (qaulan baliighan; Qur'an 4:63), facilitative speech (qaulan maysuuran; Qur'an 17:28), gentle speech (qaulan layyinan; Qur'an 20:44), noble/respectful speech (qaulan kariiman; Qur'an 17:23), and appropriate/kind speech (qaulan ma'ruufan; Qur'an 4:5; 2:235). They are treated as an interpretive framework rather than rigid labels. The study asks: (1) How are the six qaulan principles manifested in Handy Bonny's Instagram content? (2) How do the preacher, collaborators, and followers interpret the communicative style and ethical orientation of this content? and (3) What tensions arise between accessibility, popularity, religious authority, and prophetic ethics? The contribution is to move beyond description toward an ethically grounded explanation of how prophetic communication is negotiated in a platform-mediated environment.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Digital Religion and the Mediatization of Da'wah

Digital religion scholarship emphasizes that technology does not simply transmit pre-existing religious practices; it can reorganize how practices are experienced and legitimized. Campbell (2013) argues that digital religion should be understood through the relationship between religious practice and digital culture, while Hjarvard (2016) conceptualizes mediatization as a process through which media become integrated into the conditions of religion. Couldry and Hepp (2017) describe deep mediatization as a condition in which social life becomes increasingly dependent on digitally networked media. For da'wah, platform architecture can therefore influence not only where preaching occurs but also its rhythm, visual form, interactional structure, and audience expectations. In Indonesia, social media has become an important arena for Muslim religious practice. Slama (2018) documents increasing reliance on social media in

everyday Islamic practice, while Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) show how internet-based Islamic learning contributes to changing patterns of religious authority and participation. Nisa (2018) demonstrates how Instagram can be used to construct and circulate Islamic identity among young women. Digital da’wah should therefore be analyzed as a socio-cultural practice rather than as a simple technological extension of conventional sermons.

Religious Authority in Digital Islamic Communication

Religious authority is particularly important in digital da’wah because audiences encounter heterogeneous speakers whose legitimacy may derive from different sources. Eickelman and Anderson (2003) argued that new media broaden access to Islamic knowledge and alter the distribution of interpretive authority. Bunt (2018) showed how cyber-Islamic environments enable religious actors to develop authority through networked visibility and digital competence. In Indonesia, social media has contributed to the emergence of preachers who combine religious messaging with lifestyle, entertainment, and personal branding (Nisa, 2018; Slama, 2018). Authority in such an environment is negotiated rather than simply inherited. Followers may assess a preacher through perceived knowledge, sincerity, relatability, emotional resonance, responsiveness, and social recognition. The analytical question is therefore not whether a preacher is legitimate in an absolute sense, but how different forms of legitimacy are constructed and contested in digital preaching. This is important in the Handy Bonny case because the source manuscript identifies both his communication background and his non-formal religious learning.

Prophetic Communication as an Ethical Framework

Prophetic communication in Indonesian communication scholarship is associated with an ethical orientation toward truth, humanity, and transformative social action. Syahputra (2019) conceptualizes prophetic communication as communication grounded in transcendental values while remaining responsive to human and social realities. This orientation is useful for digital da’wah because it places ethical quality alongside communicative effectiveness. In this study, qaulan sadiidan emphasizes truthful and responsible speech; qaulan baliighan emphasizes speech that reaches the intended effect; qaulan maysuuran emphasizes accessible and facilitative language; qaulan layyinan emphasizes gentleness; qaulan kariiman emphasizes dignity and respect; and qaulan ma’ruufan emphasizes appropriate and beneficial speech. The categories overlap, but their analytical value lies in identifying different ethical dimensions.

Table 1. Operationalization of the Six Qaulan Principles

PRINCIPLE	CORE MEANING	DIGITAL INDICATORS	QUR’ANIC BASIS
QAULAN SADIIDAN	Truthful, accurate, responsible	Sources, careful claims, Qur’an/hadith	33:70

QAULAN BALIIGHAN	Effective impactful	and	Concise clarity, resonance	emphasis, emotional	4:63
QAULAN MAYSUURAN	Accessible facilitative	and	Simple approachable register	diction,	17:28
QAULAN LAYYINAN	Gentle coercive	and non-	Empathy, soft tone, sensitivity		20:44
QAULAN KARIIMAN	Noble dignified	and	Respectful admonition, humiliation	no	17:23
QAULAN MA'RUUFAN	Appropriate beneficial	and	Kindness, relevance, constructive advice		4:5; 2:235

Instagram and Youth-Oriented Da'wah

Instagram is not a neutral container for religious messages. Its visual orientation and participatory functions encourage compression, aesthetic presentation, repetition, and affective communication. Research on social media and religion shows that users actively interpret and recontextualize religious content rather than merely receiving it (Campbell, 2013; Hoover, 2006). For young audiences, religious messages can become intertwined with identity work, peer recognition, lifestyle, and everyday emotional concerns (Nisa, 2018). This platform context creates an ethical tension. Accessibility can make religious messages understandable, but excessive simplification may reduce precision. Emotional language can increase engagement, but it can also encourage affective response without deeper reflection. Personal branding can make a preacher relatable, but it may blur the distinction between religious authority and influencer visibility. These tensions are treated as part of the phenomenon.

METHOD

Research Design and Case Boundary

This research uses a qualitative case-study design to examine prophetic communication in Ustaz Handy Bonny's digital da'wah. A case study is appropriate when a contemporary phenomenon is investigated within its real-life context and the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not sharply separated (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). The bounded case consists of Handy Bonny's Instagram-based da'wah, associated communication practices, and perspectives of selected actors.

Data collection was conducted between January and July 2024 at the Kopo Permai residence in Bandung, West Java, identified in the source manuscript as a center of Handy Bonny's religious activities and Majelis Satu Rasa. Instagram content and digital communication were also examined. The time boundary is important because social

media content is dynamic; findings should be understood as a contextual account of the observed period.

Participants and Data Sources

The primary participant was Ustaz Handy Bonny. Supporting informants included Ustaz Rijal as manager/collaborator, Prof. Dr. H. M. Abdurrahman, M.A. as an Islamic communication expert, and three followers Najmah Zahirah, Frisca Asterina, and Farhan Bintang. Informants were selected purposively because of direct involvement, expertise, or experience. The source manuscript does not provide demographic details for all informants; this revision does not invent them. Four sources were used: observation of Reels, carousel posts, quote posts, captions, and relevant offline activities; semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face and through digital platforms such as WhatsApp; documentation including Instagram posts, digital flyers, and video transcripts; and academic literature. This multi-source design permits comparison between communication practices and participant interpretations.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed an iterative procedure based on data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Observations, interviews, and documents were organized according to the research questions; recurring practices were coded using the six qaulan principles while allowing emergent categories; convergent and contradictory evidence was compared; and interpretations were checked against critical evidence. Thematic analysis principles were used to identify recurring patterns in language, message structure, visual presentation, and ethical orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six qaulan categories functioned as sensitizing concepts rather than rigid deductive codes, reducing the risk of forcing every message into a single category.

Credibility and Ethics

Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation compared the preacher, manager/collaborator, academic expert, and followers. Technique triangulation compared observation, interviews, and documentation. Member checking involved returning interview transcripts and interpretations to informants for accuracy checking. These procedures are consistent with established qualitative trustworthiness criteria (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms and Themes of Instagram Da'wah

Observation of more than 20 Instagram posts identified four dominant content forms: Reels, carousel posts, quote posts, and extended captions. Reels emphasized visual and emotional impact; carousels provided structured explanations; quote posts delivered short reflective statements; and captions provided longer explanations supported by Qur'anic verses or hadith. Dominant themes were hijrah, relationships between men and women, tawakkal, mental health, istighfar, and istiqamah. The thematic configuration indicates an

orientation toward everyday concerns experienced by young audiences. Rather than concentrating exclusively on doctrinal exposition, the content connects religious values with relationships, emotional struggles, repentance, and personal change. This is compatible with research showing that digital religious practice increasingly occurs within everyday social-media routines (Slama, 2018; Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020).

Manifestation of the Six Qaulan Principles

The six principles are distributed across content forms rather than appearing as one uniform style. Qaulan sadiidan is most visible where captions explicitly reference Qur’an and hadith. Qaulan baliighan appears in concise, emotionally resonant formulations. Qaulan maysuuran is expressed through simple diction and colloquial language. Qaulan layyinan appears in empathetic treatment of sin, repentance, and emotional struggle. Qaulan kariiman is reflected in respectful admonitions. Qaulan ma’ruufan is reflected in broadly applicable messages of kindness and constructive social conduct.

CONTENT FORM	THEMES	COMMUNICATION PRACTICE	QAU LAN	INTERPRETATION
REELS	Tawakkal; mental health	Short phrases, emotional narration	Baliighan; Layyinan	Impact and emotional accessibility
CAROUSEL	Hijrah; istiqamah	Structured slides, concise explanation	Sadiidan; Maysuuran	Clarity and accessibility
QUOTE POSTS	Motivation; repentance	One-line reflective messages	Ma’ruufan; Kariiman	Kindness and dignified guidance
CAPTIONS	Relationships; self-reflection	Long text with Qur’an/hadith	Sadiidan; Baliighan	Grounding and persuasive meaning

Accessibility, Slang, and Qaulan Maysuuran

One clear tension concerns colloquial expressions such as 'cuaks'. Informal language can reduce social distance and make religious messages familiar to younger audiences. This is consistent with the source study’s observation that followers experienced the content as personal and approachable, and with Rahma et al. (2024), who found frequent code-switching and varied linguistic registers. However, accessibility is not synonymous with ethical adequacy. A colloquial expression may satisfy communicative accessibility while creating ambiguity or appearing to trivialize a serious religious issue. Qaulan maysuuran should therefore be evaluated together with qaulan sadiidan and qaulan ma’ruufan. Prophetic digital communication requires a balance between comprehensibility, accuracy, and social responsibility.

Emotional Appeal and Qaulan Layyinan/Baliighan

The content repeatedly uses emotionally reassuring messages concerning tawakkal, repentance, and personal struggle. Such messages can be understood through qaulan layyinan and qaulan baliighan: they employ a gentle tone while seeking an immediate affective and reflective response. Digital-religion research similarly highlights affect and personal relevance in mediated religious engagement (Hoover, 2006; Campbell, 2013). Emotional resonance should not, however, be treated as evidence of spiritual transformation. Followers reported increased awareness and lifestyle changes, but the study did not use longitudinal behavioral measurement. The appropriate conclusion is that participants perceived the content as meaningful and potentially transformative, not that Instagram exposure caused durable spiritual change.

Religious Authority and the 'Ustaz Hijrah' Position

The case exposes a tension between relatability and formal religious authority. The source manuscript notes Handy Bonny's communication background and non-formal learning through talakki. His description of his role as a 'bridge' between audiences with limited religious knowledge and deeper Islamic scholars frames his authority as mediating accessibility rather than replacing scholarly institutions. This corresponds with scholarship on the redistribution of religious authority in digital environments (Bunt, 2018; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Digital authority can emerge through visibility, communication skill, perceived authenticity, and audience recognition. The case suggests distinguishing communicative competence, religious knowledge/credentialing, and relational legitimacy. High performance in one dimension does not automatically establish equivalence in the others.

Audience Reception and Interpretive Variability

Interviews with three followers indicate that the content was perceived as personal, comforting, and relevant. Some associated the content with increased awareness of Islamic values and reported lifestyle changes. These accounts demonstrate that audiences actively interpret religious messages rather than simply receive them, consistent with digital-religion scholarship (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022; Slama, 2018). Reception was not uniformly positive. Criticism of slang and questions about authority indicate that the same strategy can produce different interpretations. This variability is theoretically important because prophetic communication is not located solely in speaker intention; it is co-constructed through audience interpretation and platform conditions.

DISCUSSION

From Prophetic Principles to Platform-Mediated Ethics

The central finding is that the six qaulan principles remain analytically useful in digital environments, but their application becomes more complex because social media introduces platform-specific pressures. Prophetic communication must simultaneously address ethical language, visual compression, algorithmically mediated visibility, audience expectations, and personal branding. This extends conventional understandings of prophetic communication. Instead of treating ethical communication as a fixed list of

desirable linguistic properties, the case suggests that prophetic digital da'wah is negotiated practice. A preacher must reconcile truthfulness with brevity, accessibility with precision, emotional resonance with doctrinal depth, and visibility with humility. The six principles therefore function most productively as an ethical matrix rather than isolated techniques.

Theoretical Contribution: Prophetic Digital Da'wah Matrix

Based on the findings, this study proposes a conceptual Prophetic Digital Da'wah Matrix with four interrelated dimensions: ethical grounding, communicative accessibility, relational empathy, and authority accountability. Ethical grounding corresponds primarily to qaulan sadiidan; accessibility draws on qaulan maysuuran and qaulan ballighan; relational empathy corresponds to qaulan layyinan and qaulan kariiman; authority accountability requires all six principles to be considered alongside source use, knowledge claims, and public positioning. The matrix differs from simple classification because it recognizes interaction among dimensions. A message may be highly accessible but weakly grounded, emotionally empathetic but insufficiently precise, or authoritative in tone but lacking relational sensitivity. Ethical quality therefore depends on balance. The framework is a proposition from a single case, not a validated universal theory, and should be tested comparatively.

Digital Visibility and Religious Credibility

The findings reinforce the distinction between visibility and credibility. Social media can increase reach without automatically increasing epistemic reliability. Bunt (2018) and Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) show why digital religious authority is distributed and contested. Communication skill can facilitate access to religious discourse, but audiences still need mechanisms for evaluating sources, interpretive competence, and ethical responsibility. Popularity metrics such as views, likes, shares, or follower counts should therefore not be treated as direct indicators of religious validity. They indicate visibility and engagement, whereas credibility requires different evidence. Prophetic communication contributes to this distinction by asking whether messages are truthful, appropriate, respectful, accessible, and oriented toward constructive transformation.

Practical Implications

For digital preachers, four principles follow. First, simplified language should remain anchored in accurate and traceable religious sources. Second, emotional storytelling should facilitate reflection rather than replace substantive explanation. Third, colloquial expressions should be evaluated for ambiguity, particularly on sensitive theological issues. Fourth, preachers should communicate the boundaries of their expertise and refer audiences to qualified scholars when specialized Islamic knowledge is required. For audiences, digital religious literacy is equally important. Followers should distinguish popularity from authority, emotional resonance from evidentiary strength, and personal testimony from general religious guidance. Researchers should examine how these distinctions are negotiated in comments, direct messages, live sessions, and cross-platform circulation.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. It examines one preacher; the Instagram corpus is described as more than 20 posts without a complete post-by-post sampling frame; supporting informants are few and purposive; behavioral change is not measured longitudinally; and formal intercoder reliability is not reported. These limitations restrict transferability and require cautious interpretation. Future research should compare preachers with different educational and organizational backgrounds, use larger systematically sampled Instagram corpora, and analyze audience comments as an independent reception dataset. Mixed-method studies could combine qualitative analysis with engagement metrics, while longitudinal research could examine whether repeated exposure is associated with durable changes in religious knowledge, attitudes, or practices. Cross-platform research would clarify how Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube affordances reshape the six qaulan principles.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that prophetic communication provides a useful ethical framework for analyzing digital da'wah, but its application on Instagram is not mechanically straightforward. In Ustaz Handy Bonny's content, the six qaulan principles are expressed through textual grounding, concise emotional messaging, accessible language, empathetic treatment of sensitive issues, respectful moral guidance, and inclusive messages of kindness. Reels, carousels, quotes, and captions adapt these ethical dimensions to digital affordances. The case reveals persistent tensions between accessibility and precision, popularity and religious authority, and emotional engagement and prophetic ethics. These tensions are central to digital da'wah. Prophetic communication in digital environments should therefore be understood as a negotiated ethical practice in which speaker intention, message form, platform affordances, audience interpretation, and authority claims interact. The proposed Prophetic Digital Da'wah Matrix offers a conceptual basis for comparative and longitudinal research.

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