



Visual Dramaturgy and the Construction of Digital Dakwah Aesthetics on Instagram: A Study of @ppsunandrajat

Ainur Rofiq¹, Rifaldi Abrorul Umam², Azkiyah Ramadhani³

Universitas Sunan Drajat Lamongan, Indonesia

ainur_rofiq@unsuda.ac.id¹, trrifaldi@gmail.com², ranirainyran@gmail.com³

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the construction of digital dakwah aesthetics through visual dramaturgy and symbolic communication in the Instagram content of @ppsunandrajat, the official account of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat (PPSD) Lamongan. The study employed a qualitative approach to digital content analysis, integrating Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective and Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Data were collected through systematic observation of Instagram content published between 2024 and 2026, visual documentation, and in-depth interviews with three key informants involved in content production and management. The findings reveal that Instagram functions not only as an information-sharing platform but also as a strategic medium for constructing institutional identity and for digital dakwah communication. Visual representations of religious authority figures, mosque architecture, institutional color palettes, and student activities are deliberately organized to create a coherent image of a pesantren that is both religiously authentic and technologically adaptive. Through dramaturgical analysis, the account operates as a digital front stage where impression management is carefully maintained. Meanwhile, semiotic analysis demonstrates that visual elements communicate denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings associated with spiritual authority, educational excellence, and institutional legitimacy. This study contributes theoretically to the development of digital dakwah studies by highlighting the significance of visual communication in shaping religious identity within contemporary social media environments. Practically, the findings provide insights for Islamic educational institutions in developing effective, audience-oriented, and visually persuasive digital dakwah strategies.

Keywords: Digital Dakwah Aesthetics; Visual Dramaturgy; Symbolic Communication; Instagram; Islamic Communication; Pesantren.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konstruksi estetika dakwah digital melalui dramaturgi visual dan komunikasi simbolik dalam konten Instagram @ppsunandrajat, akun resmi Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat (PPSD) Lamongan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis konten digital yang mengintegrasikan perspektif dramaturgi Erving Goffman dan semiotika Roland Barthes. Data diperoleh melalui observasi sistematis terhadap konten Instagram periode 2024–2026, dokumentasi visual, serta wawancara mendalam dengan tiga informan kunci yang terlibat dalam produksi dan pengelolaan konten. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Instagram tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai media penyebaran informasi, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen strategis dalam pembentukan identitas kelembagaan dan komunikasi dakwah digital. Representasi visual figur otoritas keagamaan, arsitektur masjid, palet warna institusional, serta aktivitas santri dikonstruksi secara terencana untuk membangun citra

pesantren yang religius sekaligus adaptif terhadap perkembangan teknologi. Melalui analisis dramaturgis, akun tersebut berfungsi sebagai panggung depan digital yang menampilkan manajemen kesan secara sistematis. Sementara itu, analisis semiotik menunjukkan bahwa unsur-unsur visual yang digunakan menghasilkan makna denotatif, konotatif, dan mitologis yang berkaitan dengan otoritas spiritual, keunggulan pendidikan, serta legitimasi kelembagaan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis bagi pengembangan studi dakwah digital serta kontribusi praktis bagi lembaga pendidikan Islam dalam merancang strategi komunikasi dakwah yang efektif, persuasif, dan sesuai dengan karakteristik budaya visual media sosial.

Kata Kunci: Estetika Dakwah Digital; Dramaturgi Visual; Komunikasi Simbolik; Instagram; Komunikasi Islam; Pesantren.

Corresponding Author:

Ainur Rofiq

Universitas Sunan Drajat Lamongan, Indonesia; ainur_rofiq@unsuda.ac.id

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the landscape of religious communication in contemporary society (Zhang, 2025). The emergence of social media platforms has shifted religious dissemination from conventional face-to-face interactions to digital-based communication that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries (Choirin et al., 2024). In Indonesia, this transformation has influenced various Islamic institutions, including pesantren, to adopt digital media as strategic channels for disseminating religious values and strengthening institutional engagement with broader audiences (Mustofa et al., 2023). Social media no longer functions merely as an information-sharing platform but has evolved into a space where religious identities, values, and institutional images are continuously negotiated and reconstructed (Haq & Kwok, 2024). Consequently, digital dakwah has become an important component of contemporary Islamic communication practices.

Among various social media platforms, Instagram occupies a prominent position due to its emphasis on visual communication (Russmann & Svensson, 2017). Through photographs, videos, infographics, stories, and reels, Instagram enables institutions to convey messages not only through textual narratives but also through visual representations that are capable of generating emotional engagement and symbolic meanings (Hu et al., 2014). The visual orientation of Instagram has encouraged religious institutions to develop communication strategies that integrate religious messages with aesthetic presentation. Previous studies indicate that religious organizations increasingly utilize visual content to attract younger audiences, strengthen public trust, and construct institutional legitimacy within digital environments ((Alam & Iqbal, 2024; Cheong, 2017). As a result, visual communication has become an inseparable element of contemporary dakwah practices.

The increasing utilization of social media by Islamic educational institutions has generated scholarly interest in examining digital dakwah practices. Previous studies have primarily focused on the effectiveness of social media as a medium for religious dissemination, audience engagement, and the transformation of religious authority in digital spaces (Battista, 2024; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Other studies have explored how Islamic organizations employ social media to strengthen branding, public relations, and educational promotion. However, these studies largely emphasize communication effectiveness and technological adaptation while giving limited attention to the visual and symbolic dimensions embedded within digital dakwah content. Consequently, the processes through which religious institutions construct meanings, identities, and ideological narratives through visual representation remain insufficiently explored.

One Islamic educational institution that actively utilizes Instagram as a dakwah medium is Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat (PPSD) Lamongan through its official account, @ppsunandrajat. The account consistently publishes various forms of content, including institutional promotions, religious activities, student achievements, Islamic commemorations, and educational campaigns. These contents do not merely provide information but simultaneously function as symbolic representations of pesantren identity. Visual elements such as religious architecture, Islamic attire, institutional color palettes, leadership figures, and student activities are strategically displayed to communicate particular meanings and values. From this perspective, Instagram content can be understood as a form of visual performance designed to construct specific impressions among diverse audiences, including students, parents, alumni, and the wider public.

This study argues that the digital dakwah content of @ppsunandrajat should not be viewed solely as informational communication but also as a visual and symbolic construction of institutional identity. Therefore, this research integrates Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective and Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to analyze how visual performances, symbols, and meanings are strategically organized within Instagram content. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize media utilization and communication effectiveness, this study focuses on the dramaturgical and symbolic dimensions of digital dakwah aesthetics within a pesantren context. Accordingly, the study aims to analyze how visual dramaturgy operates in the Instagram content of @ppsunandrajat, identify dominant symbolic elements embedded within the content, and explain how visual and symbolic representations contribute to the construction of adaptive digital dakwah aesthetics in contemporary Islamic communication.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm to explore the construction of digital dakwah aesthetics in the Instagram content of

Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat (PPSD) Lamongan. A qualitative approach was selected because the research focused on understanding meanings, symbols, and representations embedded in visual communication practices rather than measuring causal relationships quantitatively. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research is appropriate for investigating social phenomena through the interpretation of participants' experiences, cultural contexts, and symbolic interactions (Yin, 2018). In this study, digital dakwah content was examined as a social and communicative text that reflects institutional identity, religious values, and symbolic constructions within contemporary digital environments.

The research utilized qualitative content analysis with a semiotic-dramaturgical orientation. This design was chosen because the study sought to analyze visual performances and symbolic meanings embedded in Instagram content. The dramaturgical perspective of Goffman (1959) was used to examine impression management, front-stage performances, and identity presentation within digital spaces. Meanwhile, Roland Barthes' semiotic framework (1972; 1977) was employed to analyze visual signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The integration of these two theoretical perspectives enabled a comprehensive understanding of how visual content functions simultaneously as a communication strategy and a symbolic representation of institutional identity.

The primary data sources consisted of Instagram posts published on the official account @ppsunandrajat between January 2024 and May 2026. Data were collected through systematic digital observation, visual documentation, and in-depth interviews. The observation process involved identifying, categorizing, and documenting Instagram content that represented institutional identity, religious values, and digital dakwah practices. Visual documentation was conducted through screenshot collection and content archiving to facilitate detailed analysis of images, symbols, typography, colors, and visual compositions. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with three key informants, namely the social media administrator of PPSD (INF-01), the content creative coordinator (INF-02), and a teacher involved in dakwah content development (INF-03). These informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in content production and management.

The selection of Instagram content followed purposive sampling criteria. Content included in the analysis had to meet three requirements: (1) containing visual and symbolic elements representing pesantren identity, (2) generating significant audience engagement, and (3) reflecting diverse thematic categories such as institutional promotion, religious activities, student achievements, and Islamic commemorations. Through these criteria, seven representative Instagram posts were selected as primary units of analysis. This purposive strategy enabled the

researcher to focus on content that most clearly reflected the visual and symbolic construction of digital dakwah aesthetics within the pesantren context.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from digital observations, visual documentation, and interview results. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al., (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. At the first stage, relevant visual and textual data were selected, coded, and categorized according to research objectives. Subsequently, the data were organized and interpreted using dramaturgical and semiotic frameworks to identify patterns of impression management, symbolic representation, and ideological meaning construction. Finally, conclusions were continuously developed throughout the analytical process to generate a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram functions as a medium for constructing digital dakwah aesthetics and institutional identity within contemporary pesantren communication.

Results And Discussion

Result

The findings of this study reveal that the Instagram account @ppsunandrajat functions not merely as a digital information platform but as a strategic medium for constructing the visual identity and digital dakwah aesthetics of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat (PPSD). Through systematic observation of Instagram content published between 2024 and 2026, interviews with content managers and educators, and analysis of visual documentation, the study found that every published content item is deliberately designed to communicate specific religious, educational, and institutional values. The account does not simply document pesantren activities but actively constructs public perceptions regarding what a modern Islamic boarding school should look like in the digital era. Four dominant content categories were identified, namely institutional promotion, documentation of educational activities, appreciation and achievement content, and Islamic commemorative content. These categories collectively function as instruments for institutional branding, religious communication, and identity construction. Rather than operating as isolated posts, the contents form an integrated narrative portraying the pesantren as a religiously committed, academically active, and technologically adaptive institution.

A major finding concerns the existence of a structured impression management strategy in the production of digital dakwah content. The findings indicate that every visual representation published through Instagram undergoes a systematic process involving conceptual planning, content review, and institutional approval. Interview findings with the social media administrator (INF-01) demonstrate that content production is carefully controlled to ensure consistency with the pesantren's vision and values.

“Every content item passes through several stages before publication. The creative team develops the concept, the substance is reviewed by authorized educators, and the final approval comes from the pesantren leadership. Therefore, what appears on Instagram represents the official image of the institution.”

This statement reveals that Instagram content is regarded as an official institutional representation rather than personal or spontaneous communication. Observational findings further showed that photographs, graphic designs, captions, and visual compositions consistently display religious values, educational activities, and organizational discipline. Documentation of student admission campaigns, graduation ceremonies, religious commemorations, and academic forums illustrates how the institution selectively presents activities that reinforce positive public perceptions. The findings suggest that the account functions as a digital front stage where institutional identity is continuously performed and reproduced. Through this strategy, Instagram becomes a medium through which the pesantren negotiates its position between religious tradition and contemporary digital culture.

Another significant finding is the strategic deployment of religious authority figures as symbolic resources for building institutional credibility. Analysis of the content demonstrates that pesantren leaders, kiai, teachers, and institutional authorities repeatedly occupy central positions within visual compositions. Their appearance is especially prominent in student admission campaigns, graduation announcements, and official institutional events. According to the creative content coordinator (INF-02):

“The presence of pesantren leaders in visual content is important because they represent the values, traditions, and credibility of the institution. Many people identify the pesantren through its leaders.”

Observational findings support this statement. Religious leaders are consistently portrayed wearing formal Islamic attire, traditional clothing, and dignified expressions that communicate authority and wisdom. At the same time, they are often positioned alongside students, creating a visual narrative that connects religious leadership with educational guidance. This dual representation allows the institution to simultaneously communicate authority, accessibility, and mentorship. Documentation analysis further reveals that leadership figures frequently appear within educational contexts rather than ceremonial settings alone, reinforcing the image of pesantren leaders as active participants in educational development. Consequently, religious authority functions not only as a source of legitimacy but also as a symbolic mechanism through which institutional trust is cultivated among digital audiences.

The study also found that architectural symbols serve as dominant visual markers of pesantren identity. Across multiple categories of content, mosque domes, minarets, pesantren buildings, and aerial campus photographs consistently appear

as central visual elements. These symbols are intentionally incorporated because they possess strong associative value among audiences. Interview findings with INF-03 revealed:

“The mosque dome and the pesantren tower are among the strongest symbols of our institution. Even before reading the caption, audiences often recognize the pesantren through these visual elements.”

Observation data confirmed that architectural elements frequently occupy focal positions within visual compositions. The mosque dome, in particular, repeatedly appears as the most prominent visual object in promotional content, Islamic commemorations, and institutional announcements. Documentation analysis suggests that these architectural symbols function beyond their physical meanings. They communicate permanence, religious authority, institutional continuity, and spiritual legitimacy. Through repeated visual exposure, these symbols become shorthand representations of the pesantren itself, enabling audiences to recognize institutional identity instantly. This finding indicates that architecture operates as a symbolic language through which institutional values are visually communicated and reinforced.

Another important finding concerns the use of color symbolism as part of institutional visual branding. The study found that green and gold dominate nearly all visual content published by @ppsmandrajat. According to the social media administrator, these colors are derived directly from the official institutional logo and intentionally used to strengthen visual consistency.

“Green represents Islamic values, peace, and the pesantren environment, while gold symbolizes dignity, achievement, and the honor of the institution.”

Observational findings reveal that these colors appear consistently across student admission campaigns, religious celebrations, educational documentation, and appreciation content. Green is commonly associated with religious spirituality and Islamic identity, while gold communicates prestige and institutional excellence. Documentation analysis indicates that the repeated use of these colors creates a recognizable visual identity that distinguishes PPSD from other Islamic educational institutions on social media. Consequently, color functions not merely as an aesthetic element but as a symbolic mechanism that reinforces institutional branding and religious identity simultaneously.

The findings further reveal that representations of students (santri) occupy a central role in constructing narratives of religious modernity. Students are consistently portrayed as active, disciplined, knowledgeable, and socially engaged individuals. Visual representations include Qur’anic recitation, participation in Bahtsul Masail, graduation ceremonies, educational activities, and social interactions. These representations communicate a particular image of contemporary Islamic education in which religious commitment coexists with

intellectual development and technological adaptation. Rather than depicting students solely as recipients of religious instruction, the content portrays them as dynamic actors capable of engaging with modern challenges while maintaining Islamic values. This finding suggests that the Instagram account constructs a myth of the modern santri who successfully integrates religious tradition with contemporary social realities.

Finally, the study found that digital dakwah aesthetics at @ppsunandrajat emerge through the integration of visual dramaturgy and symbolic communication. Authority figures, architectural symbols, institutional color palettes, student representations, and carefully managed visual performances collectively create a coherent narrative portraying the pesantren as religiously authentic yet technologically adaptive. Audience engagement data further indicate that emotionally oriented content, particularly posts depicting student experiences and community life, tends to receive higher levels of interaction compared to purely informational posts. This finding suggests that digital audiences are attracted not only to institutional information but also to symbolic and emotional narratives that foster identification and belonging. Therefore, digital dakwah aesthetics function not merely as visual decoration but as a strategic communication instrument through which institutional identity, religious values, and public legitimacy are continuously constructed and negotiated within contemporary social media environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Instagram account @ppsunandrajat functions not merely as a communication platform but as a strategic arena for constructing digital dakwah aesthetics and institutional identity. The visual representations found within the account indicate that dakwah in the digital era has undergone a significant transformation from text-centered communication toward image-centered communication. This transformation reflects broader changes in contemporary media culture, where visibility increasingly becomes the dominant mode through which meaning, identity, and authority are communicated. In this context, the pesantren no longer relies solely on verbal religious messages but strategically utilizes visual symbols, aesthetic arrangements, and digital storytelling to communicate religious values and institutional credibility. These findings support (Hjarvard, 2008) theory of the mediatization of religion, which argues that religious institutions increasingly adapt their communication practices to the logic of modern media systems. The case of @ppsunandrajat illustrates how pesantren adapt to social media culture while maintaining their religious identity and educational mission.

One of the most significant findings concerns the existence of a structured impression management strategy in the production of Instagram content. The

research reveals that every visual representation published by the account undergoes a systematic process involving conceptualization, review, and institutional approval. This finding strongly aligns with Meyrowitz, (1990) dramaturgical perspective, which conceptualizes social interaction as a performance in which actors intentionally manage impressions before an audience. Within the digital environment, Instagram functions as a front stage where institutions carefully control how they are perceived by diverse audiences. Unlike face-to-face interactions, digital performances remain accessible over time, allowing audiences to repeatedly consume and interpret the presented identity. Hogan (2010) argues that social media extends Goffman's dramaturgical framework because digital content functions as an exhibition that remains available for continuous observation. The findings indicate that @ppsunandrajat operates precisely within this framework, utilizing visual performances to communicate an image of a pesantren that is religiously authentic, educationally competent, and technologically adaptive.

The strategic management of visual impressions observed in this study also reflects the increasing importance of institutional branding in contemporary Islamic education. Educational institutions today operate within competitive communication environments where visibility and public perception significantly influence public trust and institutional legitimacy (Ifnuari & Haryanto, 2025). The findings demonstrate that Instagram content is carefully curated to highlight positive representations of religious learning, student achievement, leadership authority, and organizational professionalism. This suggests that digital dakwah is no longer limited to the dissemination of religious teachings but has expanded to include institutional image construction. Similar findings were reported by Campbell & Tsuria, (2021), who noted that religious organizations increasingly employ digital media not only to communicate beliefs but also to strengthen institutional identities and maintain relevance among contemporary audiences. Therefore, the digital communication practices of PPSD should be understood as both religious and organizational strategies simultaneously.

Another important finding concerns the central role of religious authority figures in constructing institutional credibility. The repeated appearance of pesantren leaders and respected educators across multiple content categories indicates that authority remains a fundamental element of digital dakwah communication. In the context of Goffman's dramaturgy, these figures function as key performers whose presence enhances the credibility of the institutional performance. Their visual representation communicates not only religious knowledge but also moral legitimacy, historical continuity, and organizational stability. This finding supports Meyrowitz's (1985) argument that electronic media transform the relationship between authority figures and audiences by making leaders more visible and accessible. However, unlike many contemporary

influencers who construct authority through personal branding, the authority displayed by @ppsunandrajat remains rooted in traditional religious legitimacy. Consequently, the account successfully combines traditional Islamic authority with contemporary digital communication practices.

The findings further indicate that leadership figures are strategically positioned alongside students and educational activities. This visual arrangement communicates a narrative in which religious authority is closely connected to educational mentorship rather than hierarchical domination. Such representations contribute to the construction of a caring and educational institutional image. This finding differs from some previous studies of religious communication that emphasize charismatic authority as the primary source of legitimacy (Cheong et al., 2011). In the case of PPSD, authority is presented through relational and educational interactions rather than solely through symbolic status. As a result, leadership figures function simultaneously as religious authorities, educational mentors, and institutional ambassadors. This multidimensional representation strengthens public trust and reinforces the pesantren's image as a modern educational institution rooted in Islamic values (Khofi et al., 2026; Mukhlas et al., 2025).

Another significant finding concerns the role of architectural symbols in constructing digital dakwah aesthetics. Mosque domes, minarets, pesantren buildings, and aerial views of the campus repeatedly appear throughout the analyzed content. From a semiotic perspective, these visual elements function as signs that communicate meanings extending far beyond their physical forms. At the denotative level, they represent architectural structures associated with the pesantren. However, at the connotative level, they signify religious devotion, educational authority, institutional continuity, and spiritual legitimacy. This finding strongly supports Riaz et al., (2024) argument that visual signs operate through multiple layers of meaning influenced by cultural and ideological contexts. The repeated use of architectural symbols allows audiences to immediately associate visual content with Islamic educational traditions and religious authenticity.

The symbolic significance of architecture becomes even more apparent when analyzed through Barthes' concept of myth. The findings suggest that architectural imagery contributes to the construction of a broader narrative portraying the pesantren as a harmonious synthesis of tradition and modernity. Images of mosque domes positioned alongside contemporary graphic designs, aerial photography, and digital branding elements communicate a powerful message that Islamic tradition and technological advancement are not contradictory but complementary. This finding is particularly important because it challenges common stereotypes that portray traditional Islamic institutions as resistant to modernization. Instead, the visual narratives of @ppsunandrajat construct a myth of the modern pesantren—a religious institution capable of embracing technological innovation while preserving

its spiritual foundations. Such representations contribute significantly to the repositioning of pesantren within contemporary public discourse.

The study also highlights the strategic use of color symbolism as part of institutional identity construction. The dominance of green and gold across the analyzed content demonstrates a deliberate visual branding strategy designed to strengthen audience recognition and institutional consistency. According to Barthesian semiotics, colors function not merely as aesthetic choices but as cultural signs embedded with ideological meanings. In Islamic contexts, green is commonly associated with spirituality, peace, and religious identity, while gold often signifies prestige, dignity, and excellence. The findings reveal that these colors are systematically employed to reinforce both religious and institutional values simultaneously. This visual consistency contributes to what Highfield and Leaver (2016) describe as visual brand identity, enabling audiences to recognize institutional content even before engaging with accompanying textual information. Consequently, color becomes a powerful communicative resource in the construction of digital dakwah aesthetics.

A further contribution of this study concerns the representation of students (*santri*) as symbols of religious modernity. The analyzed content consistently portrays students as active, disciplined, intellectually engaged, and technologically adaptive individuals. Rather than emphasizing passive obedience or purely ritualistic practices, the account presents students participating in academic discussions, educational activities, social programs, and digital communication initiatives. These representations construct a contemporary image of Islamic education in which religious commitment coexists with intellectual development and social participation. This finding extends previous discussions on digital dakwah by demonstrating how visual narratives can reshape public perceptions regarding Islamic educational institutions. The portrayal of students as agents of positive social transformation reinforces the broader institutional narrative that pesantren remain relevant and responsive to contemporary challenges.

Another noteworthy finding relates to audience engagement patterns. The study reveals that emotionally oriented content tends to generate higher levels of interaction than purely informational content. Posts depicting student experiences, community life, and personal moments received more likes and engagement compared to formal announcements. This finding supports Papacharissi's (2009) argument that emotional connection plays a crucial role in digital communication. Social media audiences are not merely information consumers; they are participants who seek meaningful emotional experiences and opportunities for identification. Consequently, successful digital dakwah communication requires more than accurate information. It must also create emotional resonance capable of fostering audience attachment and participation. The findings suggest that @ppsunandrajat

effectively integrates informational, symbolic, and emotional dimensions within its communication strategy.

The concept of context collapse proposed by Marwick and Boyd (2011) also provides valuable insights into the findings of this study. The Instagram account simultaneously addresses multiple audience groups, including current students, prospective students, parents, alumni, and the general public. Each of these groups possesses distinct expectations, interests, and interpretive frameworks. The findings indicate that visual content is carefully designed to accommodate these diverse audiences through universally recognizable symbols and emotionally accessible narratives. This demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of digital communication dynamics, where successful content must navigate complex audience configurations without losing institutional coherence. The ability of @ppsunandrajat to maintain a consistent identity while addressing multiple audiences represents an important aspect of its digital dakwah strategy.

Overall, the findings confirm that digital dakwah aesthetics function as more than visual decoration within the communication practices of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat. Instead, aesthetics operate as a strategic mechanism for constructing institutional identity, communicating religious values, strengthening public legitimacy, and fostering audience engagement. Through the integration of dramaturgical performance and symbolic communication, Instagram becomes a powerful medium through which the pesantren negotiates its position within contemporary digital culture. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that digital dakwah aesthetics emerge through the intersection of visual dramaturgy, symbolic representation, institutional branding, and religious communication. This finding expands existing scholarship on digital dakwah by showing that visual communication is not merely a supporting element of religious messages but a central mechanism through which religious institutions construct meaning, authority, and identity in the digital era.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Instagram account @ppsunandrajat functions not merely as a digital communication platform but as a strategic medium for constructing the digital dakwah aesthetics and institutional identity of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat. Through carefully managed visual performances, the pesantren utilizes Instagram as a digital front stage where religious values, educational excellence, institutional credibility, and organizational identity are continuously represented and communicated. The findings reveal that impression management strategies are systematically implemented through content curation, the representation of religious authority figures, the use of architectural symbols, and the consistent application of institutional visual elements. These practices demonstrate that digital dakwah in contemporary pesantren contexts extends

beyond the dissemination of religious messages and increasingly serves as an instrument for institutional branding, identity consolidation, and public engagement within social media environments.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the construction of digital dakwah aesthetics is achieved through the integration of dramaturgical performance and symbolic communication. The repeated use of mosque architecture, institutional color palettes, leadership figures, and student representations generates a coherent symbolic narrative portraying the pesantren as a religiously authentic yet technologically adaptive institution. Through Barthes' semiotic perspective, these visual elements operate not only at the denotative level but also at the levels of connotation and myth, constructing meanings associated with spiritual authority, educational legitimacy, and the compatibility of Islamic tradition with digital modernity. The findings contribute theoretically to the development of digital dakwah studies by demonstrating that visual communication functions as a central mechanism through which religious institutions negotiate authority, identity, and legitimacy in contemporary digital culture.

However, this study has several limitations. The research focused exclusively on the Instagram account of a single pesantren, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other Islamic educational institutions with different organizational, cultural, and communicative contexts. In addition, the study concentrated on content production and symbolic construction without systematically examining audience reception and interpretation. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore audience responses, engagement patterns, and meaning-making processes among followers of digital dakwah content. Comparative studies involving multiple pesantren and different social media platforms may also provide broader insights into the dynamics of digital religious communication and the evolving aesthetics of dakwah in contemporary society.

REFERENCES

- Alam, L., & Iqbal, M. (2024). Transforming Religious Learning: Empowering Faith Through Virtual Congregation In Indonesia. *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika*, 21(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v21i1.747>
- Battista, D. (2024). The Digital as Sacred Space: Exploring the Online Religious Dimension. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, XV(29), 21–37. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1206998>
- Campbell, H. A., & Evolvi, G. (2020). Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.149>
- Campbell, H. A., & Tsuria, R. (2021). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in digital media*. Routledge.

- Cheong, P. H. (2017). The vitality of new media and religion: Communicative perspectives, practices, and changing authority in spiritual organization. *New Media & Society*, 19(1), 25–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649913>
- Cheong, P. H., Huang, S., & Poon, J. P. H. (2011). Religious Communication and Epistemic Authority of Leaders in Wired Faith Organizations. *Journal of Communication*, 61(5), 938–958. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01579.x>
- Choirin, M., Guleng, M. P., Arbi, D. S., & Maulan, R. (2024). Muballigh In The Digital Age Based On Insights From Indonesian Phenomenon: Leveraging Digital Learning For The Promotion Of Islamic Values. *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 9(2), 167–190. <https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v9i2.7751>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change. *Northern Lights*, 6(1), 9–26.
- Highfield, T., & Leaver, T. (2016). Instagrammatics and digital methods: Studying visual social media, from selfies and GIFs to memes and emoji. *Communication Research and Practice*, 2(1), 47–62.
- Hogan, B. (2010). The presentation of self in the age of social media: Distinguishing performances and exhibitions online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(6), 377–386.
- Hu, Y., Manikonda, L., & Kambhampati, S. (2014). What we Instagram: A first analysis of Instagram photo content and user types. *Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 595–598.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2020). *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, d. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114–133.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. Oxford University Press.
- Haq, S. U., & Kwok, R. Y. (2024). Encountering “the Other” in Religious Social Media: A Cross-Cultural Analysis. *Social Media + Society*, 10(4), 20563051241303363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241303363>
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 6(1), 9–26. https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1
- Ifnuari, R., & Haryanto, R. (2025). Barriers and Strategies of School Public Relations Management in Building Institutional Image and Public Trust: A Systematic Literature Review. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 16(2), 22–31. <https://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/jmp/article/view/66078>
- Khofi, M. B., Suheri, S., Salam, M., Wijaya, K., & Mu'is, A. (2026). Sustaining Islamic School Reputation: The Multidimensional Role of Educational Public

- Relations. *Jurnal Inovatif Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 5(1), 14–30. <https://doi.org/10.38073/jimpi.v5i1.3391>
- Meyrowitz, J. (1990). Redefining the situation: Extending dramaturgy into a theory of social change and media effects. *Beyond Goffman: Studies on Communication, Institution, and Social Interaction*, 65–97.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. 3rd. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mukhlas, U., Yunus, N. R., & Husna, F. (2025). Strategy For Overcoming The Community's Negative Image Toward Islamic Boarding Schools. *Hijri*, 14(2), 326–336. <https://doi.org/10.30821/hijri.v14i2.26909>
- Mustofa, M. Y., Mas'ud, A., & Elizabeth, M. Z. (2023). Hybrid Pesantren in Indonesia; Analyzing the Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Age. *Al-Tadzkiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 14(1), 79–104. <https://doi.org/10.24042/atjpi.v14i1.16928>
- Riaz, N., Qureshi, D. Q. A., Tahir, D. S., & Waheed, I. (2024). Signs and Symbols: A Semiotic Exploration of Visual Media and Its Underlying Ideologies. *Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies*, 2(2), 705–725. <https://jals.miard.org/index.php/jals/article/view/117>
- Russmann, U., & Svensson, J. (2017). *Introduction to Visual Communication in the Age of Social Media: Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Challenges | Editorial | Media and Communication*. <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/1263>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Zhang, L. (2025). The Digital Age of Religious Communication: The Shaping and Challenges of Religious Beliefs through Social Media. *Studies on Religion and Philosophy*, 1(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.71204/de63mn10>