

Religious Micro-celebrity: Young Preachers' Self-Presentation in Digital Sphere

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes young Muslim preachers' self-presentation in the digital sphere, especially on the Instagram platform. This attempts to answer how and why self-branding has become so prevalent among young Indonesian Muslim preachers on Instagram. Using self-presentation theory, this qualitative study argues that young Muslim preachers' self-presentation is as strategy to become micro-celebrity in digital sphere. The existence of various features on Instagram makes it easier for preachers to self-expression, self-record, and recognition. Young preachers as Instagram users become micro-celebrity because they always want recognition and to be the center of social interaction. They are actively involved with followers, being the center of attention, active in selfies, inserting jokes, and posting daily activities as strategies to be closer to digital natives. Surprisingly, their posts are not dominated by activities related to religious rituals. On the contrary, the more natural the self-presentation is presented by the young preachers, or the more similar the interests and characters of the audience are, the easier the self-branding will be. This article also theoretically implies that young Muslim preachers are themselves a brand and self-presentation is a form of brand management to become religious micro-celebrities.

KEYWORDS digital Islam; proselytization; religious micro-celebrity; self-presentation; young preacher

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menganalisis presentasi diri dai muda di ruang digital, khususnya di platform Instagram. Penulis menjawab bagaimana dan mengapa pencitraan diri menjadi begitu lazim di kalangan dai muda. Dengan menggunakan teori presentasi diri, artikel ini berargumen bahwa presentasi diri dai muda merupakan strategi untuk menjadi mikroselebritas di ranah digital. Berbagai fitur di Instagram memudahkan para dai untuk melakukan ekspresi diri, rekam diri, dan pengakuan. Mereka menjadi mikroselebritas karena selalu menginginkan pengakuan dan menjadi pusat interaksi sosial. Mereka terlibat aktif dengan pengikut, menjadi pusat perhatian, aktif dalam swafoto, menyisipkan lelucon, dan memposting kegiatan sehari-hari sebagai strategi untuk lebih dekat dengan pengikutnya. Yang mengejutkan, postingan mereka tidak didominasi oleh aktivitas yang berkaitan dengan ritual keagamaan. Sebaliknya, semakin natural presentasi diri yang ditampilkan oleh dai muda, atau semakin mirip minat dan karakter audiens, maka semakin mudah pencitraan diri dilakukan. Artikel ini berimplikasi teoretis bahwa dai muda adalah sebuah *brand* itu sendiri dan presentasi diri merupakan bentuk manajemen *brand* untuk menjadi mikroselebritas religius.

KATA KUNCI dakwah; dai muda; Islam digital; mikroselebritas religius; presentasi diri

Introduction

In the era of digital Islam (Mandaville 1999), preachers began to use social media platforms to massively convey religious messages. They then carried out various

strategies to contest, both in building self-identity, and in the struggle for discourse on social media. Digital space has indeed opened up space for the democratization of religious authority, such as gender equality in the interpretation of religious texts on social media. However, at the same time, it has become a challenge for old religious authorities (Lukman 2018). The increasing social media technology has triggered the emergence of new religious authorities with expertise in processing religious messages through images, audio, and video. The ease of interaction arising from the features of social media platforms has also triggered creativity in carrying out self-presentation among young preachers today. For this reason, a study of the process of self-presentation in the preaching strategy carried out by young preachers on social media is important to see the development of Islamic discourse in the current digital era.

Research on da'wah in the digital space has been increasingly carried out in the last decade. Weng, for example, focused on observing da'wah communication on social media by using figures from two young preachers. He concluded that polishing the beauty and visualization of da'wah is an important step for da'wah preachers, not only to increase accessibility and audience attention, but also to convince their audiences and followers in the message conveyed (Weng 2018). In particular, several scholars who focus on media studies have conducted research on self-presentation. Khamis, Ang, and Welling saw the relationship between self-presentation and the emergence of many influencers on Instagram, such as food bloggers (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2016). Smith and Sanderson observed the self-presentation behavior of ten athletes on Instagram. Meanwhile, Chen emphasized the perception of young social media users towards self-presentation by users who sell on the Instagram platform (Chen 2017). Unlike the studies above, this paper focuses on observing how young preachers in Indonesia carry out the self-presentation process to build a self-image like a celebrity.

This article analyzes the process of self-presentation as a self-branding strategy of young Muslim preachers in the digital space of social media. The author focuses on Instagram because this platform is more widely used as a medium for young preachers to present themselves. In addition, based on data from Datareportal.com, Instagram users in Indonesia in early 2024 had reached 100.9 million users, equivalent to 36.2% of the Indonesian population (Datareportal 2024). Instagram does not require much cognitive effort, unlike other social media platforms, so users are more interested in sharing their experiences and daily activities. For this reason, this article focuses on exploring two main problems. First, what are the patterns and processes of self-presentation carried out by young Indonesian preachers on Instagram? Second, why has self-presentation become so common among young Indonesian preachers on Instagram?

This article argues that the self-presentation of young preachers is a form of their branding strategy as microcelebrities on the Instagram platform. With qualitative research, the author focuses on three accounts of young Muslim

preachers on Instagram to see their self-presentation patterns in the digital sphere. This article does not propose an ideal pattern in da'wah communication in the digital space, but the author emphasizes the exploration of self-presentation patterns and the factors behind them. This article has theoretical implications for redefining the religious identity of new religious authority owners, specifically on social media platforms that continue to experience technological developments amidst the current climate of individualism.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Presentation

In self-presentation theory, humans are considered performers, expressing their identity through verbal and non-verbal messages, aiming to present the most credible appearance to the audience. Self-presentation tends to be controlled by certain interests or goals. Therefore, people who do self-presentation tend to have to balance personal interests or individual goals with the "self" they consider what the audience or others want. In self-presentation theory, two things must be analyzed: frontstage and backstage appearances. In front of the stage, people tend to be careful in presenting themselves. Conversely, behind the stage, people tend to ignore what has been presented in front of the stage (Smith and Sanderson 2015, 343). A person's self-presentation is also a complex negotiation process between the two. Both can contain many strategies in presenting themselves by involving the dynamic process of interpreting the audience, goals, and context (Smith and Sanderson 2015, 344).

Online media, such as social media, allow users to demonstrate a more prominent identity that may not be appropriate or possible in the context of direct interaction with the audience. The digital world has a stronger ability than the virtual world to control self-presentation. The digital world does not require the presence of an audience in person (Smith and Sanderson 2015, 344). According to the theory, self-presentation is driven by specific interests or goals. In the context of this article, this is evident in how young preachers manage their appearance in the digital sphere, aiming to gain recognition and enhance social engagement with their audience.

Da'wah and Digital Sphere

The use of digital platforms as new media in Islamic discourse has been widely studied, seeing social media as an arena for religious contestation (Schmidt 2018; Salik 2019; Akmaliah 2020; Wildan 2017; Khisbiyah et al. 2018; Hidayatullah and Abdullah 2020). These studies mostly touch on social media and religious authorities. The trend of digital da'wah studies has developed (Marwantika 2021). Research on da'wah in the digital space has been studied by Weng (2018). Meanwhile, Zamhari studied that digital platforms have become a space for traditional religious authorities to present alternative da'wah for the urban middle class (Zamhari 2021). Rumata et al. see that digital da'wah can increase religious moderation among millennials (Rumata, Iqbal, and Asman 2021). However, Muhaemin said academic preachers still have limitations in maximizing

the use of digital media (Muhaemin 2017). On the other hand, Zaid, by studying four influencer preachers on YouTube media, showed that they pose a challenge to traditional religious authorities because they display a Muslim identity based on a new and global lifestyle (Zaid et al. 2022). Although they have studied preachers and da'wah in the digital space, the study has not touched on self-presentation in preachers.

Several studies have specifically linked da'wah and social media. Nurazizah and Kurniati (2022); Ihza et al. (2023); and Afidah and Arif (2023) were involved in research on the use of social media as a public space for da'wah. Ummah (2020) specifically looked at the strategies of Islamic boarding school students, especially the virtual community AIS Nusantara, which began to spread to the use of social media in digital da'wah. Meanwhile, Suhendi and Sholeh conducted research on the digital da'wah movement in Islamic boarding schools (Suhendi and Sholeh 2021). The use of social media is also seen as a means of da'wah in the digital era so that religion can be understood by the millennial generation (Lestari 2020). However, these studies have not focused on observing the phenomenon of da'wah self-branding in the digital sphere of social media.

Religious Entrepreneur and Social Media

The shift of authority into the digital space has given rise to a distinction between religious authority into two, namely traditional religious authority and new religious authority (Kailani, Ikhwan, and Suhadi 2019). These two authorities are often used as equivalent to the terms religious scholar and religious entrepreneur. Religious scholars are people who have formal religious education and study Islamic texts through educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools and Islamic universities. Religious entrepreneurs are those who can package religious messages through new media, such as writing, training, and short videos. Religious knowledge is obtained from easily accessible sources, such as translated books, religious studies, or the Internet (Researcher 2019). However, the development of digital Islam has begun to blur the mapping of this authority because traditional religious authorities have begun to use virtual media massively. It could be that a preacher has an educational background in Islamic boarding schools or universities but can process religious messages to be conveyed through digital media. Therefore, religious authority is an important concept for viewing agents of discourse struggle and for carrying out a new mapping of religious authority on social media.

The relationship between religious authority and identity with digital platforms as media has been widely studied. The YouTube platform, for example, has become a medium for contesting ideologies and political choices (Lian 2018). Research on religious authority and social media is also one of the current research trends. Islam in the social media space is closely related to the issue of contestation of religious authority. In Indonesia, the study of Islamic religious authority on social media has attracted the attention of researchers. Zamhari studied that digital platforms have become a space for traditional religious

authorities to present alternative da'wah for the urban middle class (Zamhari 2021). Schmidt concluded that the contestation of Nusantara Islam and radical Islam on social media impacts the dynamics of the aesthetic aspects of religious authority (Schmidt 2021). Salik also studied the role of traditional Islamic ustadz in online media in preserving moderate Islam (Salik 2019). Meanwhile, Wildan, using a sociolinguistic approach, studied the contestation of fundamental, moderate, and liberal groups on Facebook social media (Wildan 2017). Although they have studied the contestation of Islam on social media, these studies have not touched on the process of self-representation of new religious authorities on Instagram social media specifically.

Research Method

This research used qualitative data. This research used primary sources of virtual data. The virtual data were in photos and videos from young preacher accounts on Instagram. The Instagram platform was chosen because it was predominantly used to upload photos and videos to build self-branding. Data search was carried out using a search engine on the www.instagram.com page. Virtual data were focused on images and videos uploaded by the personal accounts of preachers selected as the object of research material.

Data collection was in the form of observation. Initial data were in the form of photos and videos in the virtual world. In this case, observation was done through observing the phenomenon of self-presentation in digital space. Primary data were collected by first investigating the population of posts related to preacher self-presentation in the form of photos and videos uploaded by three young preacher accounts. The three popular young preachers are HB, SN, and HA. To fulfill the research ethics clearance, we mention them by using initials. The selection of these three young preachers was not based on their origin but based on their popularity on Instagram social media. Observations were made to see the symbols, patterns, models, and processes used in self-presentation. Observations were made on their account platforms.

The data analysis process used content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was used to organize information related to the self-presentation of young preachers taken from photos and videos uploaded to their respective accounts. This information was organized into categories of aspects of patterns and processes carried out as self-presentation strategies on digital media. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of small themes that emerged when observing data related to the self-presentation carried out by young preachers. After that, the data from the observation results were analyzed critically to find the interests, motives, and reasons behind the self-presentation of young preachers on social media.

Results

Young preachers and Instagram as social practice

The Instagram platform as a medium also shapes and influences social processes

in Muslim life. If we look at media as practice, Instagram is a medium that shapes social life. This concept also examines how the meanings displayed on Instagram have social consequences. This concept is also related to what people do, say, and think in relation to media in various situations and contexts. Various behaviors emerge in the digital space of social media, such as searching for information, watching and being watched, presenting oneself for the sake of remaining present in the public space, recording and saving activities, always being updated with news, communication interactions through comments, opening relationships, and maintaining friendships (Chen 2017, 3).

Initially, Instagram was a social media for visual content in the form of photos. However, in its development, Instagram has also prompted users to upload videos within a certain time limit. Instagram allows users to easily elaborate and edit photos and videos by adding several image effects and music. This platform also provides a comment column and a like feature so that interaction between users occurs. Unlike the Facebook platform, Instagram does not require much cognitive effort. Instagram also does not require making long video recordings as on YouTube. This makes digital society users more comfortable and makes it easier for them to share recordings of daily activities in the form of images or videos. The Instagram application is also easier to use with mobile phones and digital tools that are very close to everyday life. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram allows people to interact by viewing, liking, and commenting on other users' accounts without following each other's accounts first (Chen 2017, 3).

Activities on Instagram have imitated real-world social activities and can even surpass some aspects of social interaction. The advantage of social interaction without being face-to-face is a distinct advantage. Young preachers also utilise this advantage to interact with their congregations or fans, especially from the digital community (digital natives). Preachers can interact with followers. This interaction can begin with self-representation to invite reactions from their followers. Smith and Sanderson's research has shown the use of Instagram among athletes in self-presentation (Smith and Sanderson 2015, 345). Likewise, with the advantages of Instagram, young preachers can control their self-presentation and express aspects of their religious and personal identity that are considered most interesting to their digital audiences and followers.

This study focuses on three Instagram accounts owned by HB, SN, and HA. These three young preachers are popular on social media. Their Instagram accounts have a blue tick as an indicator of having many followers. HB is known as a stylish preacher because of his millennial style. Born in 1988 in Bandung, this preacher is an alumnus of the Department of Communication Sciences, Padjajaran University, Bandung. He began his career as a businessman. He also studied at the Daarut Tauhid Islamic Boarding School under the guidance of KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar. Currently, his Instagram account has a blue tick showing his popularity and many followers. His account is followed by 831 followers and has posted 977 posts, both photos and short videos. In addition to Instagram, he also has a YouTube account with 66.3 thousand subscribers.

The second young preacher is SN. He is a preacher on national TV media on the Islam Itu Indah program. He is also known as a hafiz of the Qur'an. This young man, born in 1992 in Maros, South Sulawesi, is also popular on Instagram. His account has 1.6 million followers with 608 posts. In his Instagram bio, he introduces himself as H. (his full name), S.Sos.i., M.Ag P. Leo by identifying himself as part of the TV program @islamituindahstv, and includes a contact number for business purposes and product endorsements.

The third young preacher is HA, an Indonesian preacher who is close to young people. This young man, born in 1981, was born in Aceh and studied at Al-Azhar University. He is the founder of the Pemuda Hijrah movement and is active in preaching among young punks, motorcycle gangs, skateboarders, BMX bikers, and other hobby communities. He also often wears trendy clothes when delivering sermons. His Instagram account currently has 9.3 followers and 1,331 posts. On his account, HA introduces himself as the Founder of Shift Pemuda Hijrah Movement, the mentor of @pesan_trend & @sekolahrimba.id, and the quote "Many games, many benefits, many rewards." In addition, he also includes management contacts for business purposes.

Instagram self-presentation patterns of young preachers on Instagram

Self-branding is an effective communication method for young preachers to reach millennial audiences and digital society in general in the digital space. This self-branding is determined by the ability to present oneself through social media, especially Instagram. Young preachers have various strategies to stay connected with their digital audiences. Their posts are not always about religious symbols, rituals, or sermons. Their posts are interspersed with various self-presentation patterns and can be categorized into the following sub-themes.

Millennial and trendy image

Young preachers tend to wear fashionable millennial-style clothes. On his account, HB likes to wear hats, t-shirts, and sweaters when preaching in front of an audience. He also often wears boots and rides a big motorbike. Likewise, SN and HA have uploaded photos of themselves wearing a beanie or an upside-down hat and a t-shirt several times. In addition, these young preachers' average photo and video posts are accompanied by light preaching captions and interspersed with light humor. HB is also involved in several youth events. For example, he watched the 2022 World Cup final with young people who were given an official flyer for the nobar event with the theme "Ustadz Ngobrol Bola" (HB 2022s). SN also posted a video of himself playing the guitar and singing (SN 2022j).



Figure 1. Young **Preachers'** Self-Presentation on Instagram

Modest personality

Young preachers also try to show their flexible image and are willing to socialize with any group. Not only sociable, they also build a humble personality, willing to do simple things, appear trivial, act like ordinary people, and are humorous.

They try to show no barrier between themselves and their audience or congregation. Bonny posted a video of a K-POP band choreography, replacing the sound with Sundanese drum and flute music. The video looks funny with the local music accompaniment and the right K-POP dance moves. This post is not forgotten to be given words that are close to the problems of millennials, "Stay enthusiastic and happy for you wherever you are.... In the midst of the recession of love and discrimination from exes... Believe that you can and are strong to face all of this..." (HB 2022p). This post was then liked more than 21.9 thousand times and 891 comments from netizens. He also posted himself sleeping on a tarpaulin **while touring with the caption, "When, Where, And With Whom... When sleep time is important... It's better at night... Also Part of the Day.... If you're touring/driving when you're sleepy, it's better to sleep than get hurt... *If this is in a hotel basement, that's wrong"** (HB 2022q). SN, for example, shared several photos and videos of himself playing ball with friends (SN 2022b), playing funny filter games on Instagram (SN 2022a). HA is a preacher who likes horse riding. Several of his video uploads are related to horse riding (HA 2022b). He also uploaded a video of himself brewing black coffee (HA 2022d). HA often shares his activities with friends in the forest. One of them is a photo showing him camping with his friends in front of a tent and a fireplace heating water (HA 2015).



Figure 2. Modest and Friendly Personality

Humanist and social awareness

The humanist aspect is related to the social role of helping others with both material and non-material support. Bonny, for example, posted the process of building a *tahfiz* house and invited people to donate or donate to students who memorize (HB 2022l), took a photo of herself kissing the hand of a disabled high school student sitting in a wheelchair (HB 2022r), gave gifts in the form of money and cakes on *takbiran* night for children and the general public (HB 2022n), and gave a wheelchair as a gift to a child with cerebral palsy (HB 2022o). Likewise, Syamsuddin uploaded a photo of the Palestinian flag as support for independence with the caption, "#freepalestina" (SN 2021). Similar to HB, HA also raised funds for the construction of a mosque (HA 2023b). Another thing HA did was enter the realm of education by building a Jungle School as a learning facility for children to play and learn together in the open air (HA 2022c).



Figure 3. Humanistic Activities and Social Awareness of Young Preachers

Harmonious family

Young preachers also often show their daily lives with their families, even in private matters. HB, for example, uploaded a short video of him eating with his wife and children at a Korean restaurant with the caption, "My first love....Always you...The best....As much as I can." However, the end of his caption still conveys a

religious message, “Remember, that happiness lies not only in wealth, popularity, let alone power...But in piety” (HB 2023). This post was only a day old and has been liked 6,762 times and commented on by 55 netizens. Likewise, SN shared a photo of himself with his wife and newborn child. This photo was specifically pinned so that it always appears on the front page of his Instagram account. This photo received many responses, up to 284 thousand “likes” (SN 2022c). HA also uploaded a photo of him holding his daughter while giving the caption “Happy birthday” (HA 2021). He tries to present himself as a harmonious head of the family who loves his children. The preachers above build their self-representation as heads of families or husbands who always maintain peace and tranquillity in their families.



Figure 4. Young Preachers and Activities with Family

Rituals and symbols of piety

As a religious figure, they also show their identity as devout Muslims, such as praying, reciting the Koran, performing prayers, and carrying out sunnah acts. HB, for example, posted a photo of herself leading a prayer with a caption that rhymed in Sundanese (HB 2022j). At other times, she posted videos of herself performing the Umrah pilgrimage (HB 2022h), reading the Koran in the car on the way to the da'wah location (HB 2022k), and visiting the tomb of the founder of the Muhammadiyah organization, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (HB 2022m). On the other hand, SN also posted a video of himself leading the Eid prayer (SN 2022f). Attaki did the same thing by uploading a photo of himself leading prayers at a mosque (HA 2022a).



Figure 5. Religious Activities of the Preachers

Endorser

Bonny uploaded a video of product endorsement, such as beauty *telon* oil, with the caption, “Take Care of Your Health....Take Care of Your Beauty....Have you tried it yet??...Check it out @olvamid” (HB 2022i). HB also posted togetherness with family while promoting products and captioned it, “Alhamdulillah, in this moment of togetherness, I am wearing a sarong, *peci*, and Muslim clothes from @gajahduduk_id” (HB 2022a). SN also received product endorsements, such as Ambewas herbal medicine. In his video, he also added hadith evidence to support the promotion of herbal medicine (SN 2022d). HA did the same thing. He received a promotion for herbal products (HA 2023a).



Figure 6. Preachers are Promoting Products

Upper middle-class image with luxury things

Young preachers do not hesitate to present themselves using luxury goods or entering a luxurious environment. They become part of the social circle by showing off facilities, attending important events, being with important and popular figures, and using branded goods. Their posts are dominated by daily activities, not religious propagation. Bonny uploaded a video of him playing golf with the caption, “There are many lessons from this golf sport... One of them is

patience, controlling emotions, being calm when facing problems" (HB 2022e). He also posted watching a solo music concert (HB 2022b). In addition, he also often uploads videos of touring with a big motorbike (*moge*) and many posts of him riding a branded or unique motorbike (HB 2022d). There is also an upload of a vacation photo to Korea with one frame of a Korean person wearing traditional Korean clothes" (HB 2022c). SN did something else. He uploaded a photo of himself on a jet plane (SN 2022i), giving his wife a gift of Nike sneakers (SN 2020a), and eating seafood at a star-rated hotel restaurant (SN 2020b). Unlike both of them, HA does not seem to be too inclined to show off his self-image by using luxury and branded goods or being in a luxurious environment. He tends to show an image of simplicity but is sociable and close to the world of young people.



Figure 7. Preachers and Their Activities with Luxury Goods

Socialite

Young preachers often present themselves as people close to the general public. However, on the one hand, they also try to show themselves to the digital public as part of socialites or important and influential people. They are active and involved in non-religious events, parties, and public space activities with political figures, more senior religious figures, and important figures in government. HB, for example, posted a photo of herself with Ustaz Abdul Somad, better known for his knowledge by the digital community. This shows that he is in the same circle of friends with important people. In another post, HB posted several videos of birthday greetings for his wife from several artists, such as from the artist couple Dimas and Miniarti (HB 2022f), and Eros, a member of Sheila on Seven (HB 2022g). He wanted to show that he has friends with Indonesian artists. Meanwhile, the SN account posted a photo with the President and First Lady of the Republic of Indonesia and was captioned, "If you hate something from someone, then you must like something else" (SN 2022h). This photo was then pinned to remain the first post on his Instagram account. In addition, SN also uploaded posts to show the important roles and relationships of other people. When appearing at the inauguration of the Jakarta International Stadium, in the caption of his photo, he

tagged the Instagram account of Anis Baswedan, who was then serving as the governor of Jakarta (SN 2022e). At another time, he also uploaded a photo with H. Roma Irama as a famous artist (SN 2022g). HA also uploaded several posts with artists. One of them is a video of Rafi Ahmad's greeting for participating in the @kitaforum.id event with HA (HA 2022e).



Figure 8. Preachers with Famous Artists and Figures

Various photo and video posts in the eight main themes above are used as seasoning to convey short and light da'wah. The invitation to da'wah can be in the form of direct audio in the video or in the form of writing in the caption of each post. For that, it can be said that self-presentation is part of the da'wah communication strategy carried out by young da'wah. However, behind this da'wah strategy, some individual goals and intentions cannot be separated from the struggle for identity and religious authority in the digital space. These young da'wah are part of the new religious authority that must face the traditional religious authorities that have also spread in the digital space. Expertise in managing religious messages into Figures and videos is one of the important symbolic capitals in the current era of digital Islam.

Discussion

Instagram triggers young preachers to be more expressive in the digital world. Various new features from Instagram allow them to record themselves, identify themselves, and gain recognition from the digital community. As a visual medium, preachers record their daily activities for personal archives and to pamper the public. In this way, young preachers make Instagram a photo and video album for personal use and an album to satisfy the public as celebrities share posts of their daily activities.

In addition to the interests of self-photo albums, Instagram also triggers young preachers to express themselves with religious symbols, random styles, and simple daily activities. Young preachers take photos and post them on their accounts. This activity allows them to show off their likes, values, lifestyles, and beliefs to the most trivial and simple things. Self-expression is also triggered by

various interesting features that allow users to edit Figures and videos easily without the help of a laptop or computer.

In addition to the two aspects above, young preachers also use Instagram to **gain recognition. The presence of the like feature with the “heart” symbol allows** young preachers to gain recognition from Instagram users. The ambition to seek recognition also **makes preachers “selfish”**. They always try to make posts that can **attract many “likes” or “hearts” even though the posts have nothing to do with** religious symbols. In this way, young preachers are also trying to express themselves for personal satisfaction and gain recognition from the digital community (digital natives). Recognition in the digital world has a positive impact on their preaching not only in the digital public space, but also in the real-world public space.

In social interactions on social media, Instagram is used to interact with family and old friends in everyday life and to build interactions with other users to create an identity and popularity like a celebrity. Because this identity of popularity has limited reach, this identity is called microcelebrity. Young preachers build fame and popularity to gain experience like artists. One of their strategies is to try to appear with celebrities with high popularity, either as an invitation to preach or to be in one event. These young preachers will try to take pictures together and post their photos to show their identity that they are on the same level of socializing with celebrities. Another strategy is for young preachers to be involved **in conversations in the comments column or provide a “like” response with the “heart” feature on artist or celebrity posts. In addition, they** often tag important figures' Instagram accounts in their captions. These strategies are carried out to connect with the circle of fame and increase their popularity beyond their own account followers.

Based on the discussion above, this study shows that the self-presentation behavior of young Muslim preachers, along with the increasingly sophisticated features on Instagram makes it easier for preachers to express themselves (self-expression), record themselves (self-record), and be recognized (recognition). Instagram allows young preachers to become like celebrities because they want recognition and the centre of social interaction. They are actively involved with followers, become the centre of attention, actively take selfies, insert jokes, and post daily activities as a strategy to get closer to the digital community. The eight main themes in self-representation above show that young preachers tend to be microcelebrities like celebrities in general. Their posts are not dominated by activities related to religious propagation cognitively. On the contrary, the more natural the presentation displayed by young preachers, or the more similar their interests and characters are to the audience, the easier it is to brand themselves.

The self-presentation process is part of the contestation in the digital space. Young preachers are no longer contesting with traditional religious authorities alone but with other popular young preachers. The better the self-presentation, the more followers and popularity. The popularity aspect positively impacts a career as a preacher, wider relations, product endorsements, and cooperation

with various parties. Thus, self-presentation in the preaching strategy is also inseparable from the interests of identity politics and economics in the digital space.

Conclusion

The self-presentation of young preachers in the digital social media space turns out to show at least eight main patterns or themes that are displayed, both in photos, videos, and captions on Instagram, namely (1) a millennial and trendy image, (2) a humanistic attitude and caring for others, (3) a harmonious family life, (4) personality and interests, such as a humble attitude, trivial things, humour, (5) a devout Muslim identity, such as prayer, reciting the Koran, praying, sunnah things, (6) endorsement of goods from several sponsors, (7) an upper-middle-class image with symbols of luxury, good facilities, and important events (8) sociality by showing together with important, influential, and popular figures.

Various photo and video posts in the eight main themes above are used as seasoning to convey short and light da'wah. The invitation to da'wah can be in the form of direct audio in the video or in the form of writing in the description of each upload. For this reason, self-presentation is part of the da'wah communication strategy carried out by young preachers. However, behind this da'wah strategy, some individual goals and intentions cannot be separated from the struggle for identity and religious authority in the digital space. These young preachers are part of the new religious authority that faces traditional religious authorities who have also spread in the digital space, as well as fellow religious entrepreneurs. Expertise in processing religious messages into figures and videos is one of the important symbolic capitals in the current era of digital Islam.

In addition, their posts are dominated by daily activities, not religious matters. Posts on Instagram are not for religious purposes. On the contrary, the more natural the presentation displayed by young preachers, or the more similar the interests and characters are to the audience, the easier their self-presentation is. Self-presentation that is easily accepted like this will strengthen emotional ties and closeness with the digital community. The results of this study have theoretical implications that despite receiving endorsements, young Muslim preachers are brands themselves, and self-presentation is a form of their self-brand management as a religious micro-celebrity.

This research provides significant contributions in understanding how brand imaging and self-presentation play a role in religious contexts, particularly in the digital era. Young preachers can utilize these strategies to expand their outreach on digital platforms. Therefore, it is highly recommended that religious institutions and policymakers consider offering training for young preachers in managing their digital presence wisely and ethically. This training can help them deliver religious messages effectively without losing their spiritual essence. For future research, it is suggested that these themes be studied on other digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, or Facebook, which may offer different dynamics in self-presentation. Additionally, cross-cultural studies could enrich our understanding of how different religious traditions utilize digital media to

build identity and religious authority. Such research could provide more comprehensive insights into the role of digital media in the transformation of global religious authority.

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