

Borderless Preaching by Shaykh Salar Rasoul: Integrating Pop Culture into Islamic Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Shaykh Salar Rasoul (SSR) (@shaykhrasoul), a Canadian imam and influential digital religious figure, integrates global pop culture into his da'wah to create a form of "borderless preaching." Through a digital observation analysis of his TikTok and Instagram videos, particularly those referencing popular culture such as Beyblade and Formula 1. The research explores how SSR employs pop culture as a shared global language to communicate Islamic principles in relatable and entertaining ways. Findings show that SSR's approach relies on semantic bridging, transforming widely recognized cultural symbols into moral lessons that resonate with diverse, international audiences. His humorous, personable style and cultural fluency enable his content to circulate beyond Muslim communities and become part of global digital discourse. This study situates SSR within broader frameworks of globalization, digital religion, and mediascapes, demonstrating how he exemplifies a modern model of da'wah that adapts effectively to contemporary global cultural flows while retaining the authenticity of Islamic teachings.

KEYWORDS borderless preaching; globalization; pop culture; Shaykh Salar Rasoul; social media preaching.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana Syekh Salar Rasoul (SSR) (@shaykhrasoul), seorang imam Kanada dan tokoh agama digital yang berpengaruh, mengintegrasikan budaya pop global ke dalam dakwahnya untuk menciptakan bentuk "dakwah tanpa batas". Melalui analisis digital observation terhadap video TikTok dan Instagram-nya, khususnya yang merujuk pada budaya populer seperti Beyblade dan Formula 1, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana SSR menggunakan budaya pop sebagai bahasa global bersama untuk mengkomunikasikan prinsip-prinsip Islam dengan cara yang mudah dipahami dan menghibur. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan SSR memanfaatkan jembatan semantik, mengubah simbol budaya yang dikenal luas menjadi pelajaran moral yang beresonansi dengan beragam audiens internasional. Gaya humoris, ramah, dan kefasihan budayanya memungkinkan kontennya beredar di luar komunitas Muslim dan menjadi bagian dari wacana digital global. Studi ini menempatkan SSR dalam kerangka kerja yang lebih luas pada konteks globalisasi, agama digital, dan lanskap media, menunjukkan bagaimana ia mencontohkan model dakwah modern yang beradaptasi secara efektif dengan arus budaya global kontemporer sambil mempertahankan keautentikan ajaran Islam.

KATA KUNCI dakwah tanpa batas; globalisasi; budaya pop; Syekh Salar Rasoul; dakwah melalui media sosial.

Introduction

“Is eating pork in Minecraft *haram*?” — this question was posed to Shaykh Salar Rasoul (@shaykhrasoul) on his social media account, and it became the most-viewed video on his TikTok page. Most of his top ten TikTok videos are similarly “unserious,” such as: “Is it *haram* to play Beyblade?” “Will I have my phone in *Jannah*?”, or—one of the funniest for me—“Shaykh, is it *halal* to do ‘*umrah* in Roblox?” These are the kinds of questions that might not usually be asked to qualified religious authorities, though it is certainly not impossible for such questions to reach them. What makes this phenomenon interesting is that Shaykh Salar Rasoul (SSR) actually answers them—questions that many would consider too trivial—and he does so in a unique way. He openly admits when he does not know the specific details of the topic, yet he consistently connects each question to a meaningful Islamic discourse. It is not every day that we hear a Shaykh teaching lessons through Beyblade or Roblox.

He does the same when responding to questions related to Formula 1 racing, such as “Is Max Verstappen’s dominance considered *zulm* in Islam?” In recent years, F1 fans know well how overwhelming Verstappen’s dominance has been. SSR responded that Verstappen’s performance reflects the Prophet Muhammad’s message that whatever one does should be done with excellence to achieve the best results — and that is precisely what Verstappen is doing. Another memorable moment occurred when the Shaykh was asked about Ferrari, a historically successful team that has faced significant decline in recent seasons. Someone asked him, “Is what Ferrari is doing to its drivers *haram*?” and he answered by connecting the issue to a broader religious discourse: Ferrari is failing to support its drivers in their pursuit of championships, even though a team should work together to succeed. He then linked this to the idea that the ummah must cooperate to resist injustice and oppression, noting that what is happening in Palestine is far more *haram* than anything Ferrari is doing to its drivers. SSR truly manages to combine everyday issues, pop culture, and religious messages in compelling ways.

These interactions with his followers—often through questions that seem excessively unserious—have made him one of the most popular shaykhs on social media. He has 530,000 followers on TikTok with 22.3 million likes, and 542,000 followers on Instagram. (Salar Rasoul’s Instagram Statistics – socialblade.com, December 2025) These are not small numbers, especially given that religious content creators operate in a highly niche market and rarely reach such large audiences. Forty-nine of his Instagram videos have surpassed one million views, with the highest reaching 22.2 million; on TikTok, his most viral video has reached 14.4 million views. It might once have been unimaginable that a religious figure would need to navigate today’s media landscape, with algorithms whose complexity is nearly impossible to follow — yet SSR has proven that he can thrive within it.

The absurdity of many of these questions can be categorized as popular culture—or pop culture—which, by Storey (2021) defined as a “... culture that is widely favored or well-liked by many people, or culture that originates from ‘the people’, but more commonly, it is culture produced and circulated by the

culture industries.” Pop culture may therefore be understood as a kind of culture enjoyed or recognized by people across geographical boundaries (Jenkins 2008). Its references know no limits: music, games, sports, memes—creating a global language that transcends nations. An Italian fan can effortlessly discuss the latest developments in F1 or Minecraft with someone from China. Pop culture is universal; it is also a variable carried freely by globalization (Thussu 2018). Just as American rock or British punk once spread to other parts of the world and were adapted into new forms of pop culture (Bennett 2017), contemporary globalization has created a borderless environment in which pop culture becomes a universal language (Couldry and Hepp 2018). This environment enables da’wah to operate in a new lingua franca, which Shaykh Salar Rasoul has adapted remarkably well.

According to information from his website, shaykhrasoul.com, Shaykh Salar Rasoul (SSR), born Abdulaziz Salar Rasoul, is a well-known Canadian imam, educator, and community leader with over two decades of dedication to Islamic education, public engagement, and leadership. He has extensive experience in education, holding degrees in Islamic studies, electrical engineering, and education. He is also a hafiz who has studied under various scholars. SSR regularly delivers sermons at mosques and participates in both online and offline events as a speaker and storyteller. His humor and authenticity allow him to connect with people through heartfelt and thought-provoking content that resonates with youth, professionals, and families alike.

What SSR does is not entirely new; many religious authorities have engaged with popular culture before (Adam 2020; Hasanah 2025; Muiyasaroh and Alam 2025). However, what distinguishes his approach is his ability to adapt to global pop culture as a bridge between religious messages and global audiences. His use of English, an international language, further broadens his reach. SSR demonstrates how adaptation in language and medium has become a transformative point for da’wah in the era of globalization. Importantly, his messages maintain authenticity: his personality, his engagement with pop culture, and the religious values he conveys remain intact. This is not merely a trend—it is a phenomenon worthy of academic attention.

There is already considerable research on how preachers on social media use pop culture as a method or reflective tool in their da’wah. For example, Felix Siau uses *One Piece* as religious imagery (Romario 2022), a mobile legend gamer who is also an ustadz (Kushardiyanti, Mutaqin, and Nurhidayah 2023), and Indonesian preachers have incorporated elements of Korean hallyu (Muiyasaroh and Alam 2025). However, both examples rely on Indonesian as the medium of communication, unlike SSR, who uses English and integrates multiple pop culture references across his videos.

Therefore, this article aims to examine how SSR uses pop culture as a medium for his da’wah while consistently delivering messages of faith and peace. It also analyses how this preaching style renders his message “borderless.” The interplay between Islamic teachings and global pop culture creates a communicative space that attracts audiences from numerous countries, as seen in the diverse interactions within his comment sections.

This article explores SSR through his social media videos and the interactions

between SSR and his audience — as well as audience-to-audience engagements — in the comment sections. Using a cultural studies approach grounded in digital observation (Hine 2020), the article examines SSR entirely through his digital presence. The focus is on his global interactions built upon pop culture references as shared global symbols, without delving into detailed biography, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), or internal discourses and debates.

SSR exemplifies a modern model of *da'wah* that keeps pace with the times. He does not bring contemporary issues directly into Islamic discourse; instead, he bridges them through popular culture. Therefore, exploring how SSR transforms global pop culture into an unexpectedly effective tool for preaching helps us understand what Islamic messages can look like in an age when *Beyblade*, *F1*, and *Roblox* are shared references worldwide.

Globalization, Pop Culture and Preaching: A Brief Conceptual Background

Compared to a single event, globalization is better understood as a continuous phenomenon, which Scholte (2017) defines as "...processes of deterritorialization or the spread of supraterritoriality, whereby social space is no longer wholly mapped by territorial geography." Within this process of deterritorialization, there is a wide-ranging diffusion across nearly all aspects of life—not only in economics, but also in flows of culture, information, and media. As the world becomes connected through a single stream, cultural references can move freely across national borders (Tomlinson 1996). Appadurai's (1996) concept of "global cultural flows" highlights how media serve as the primary channel through which information, images, videos, symbols, and pop culture circulate.

Pop culture is fundamentally a form of entertainment-based culture (Shuker 2013). However, it has shifted into a global language understood by almost everyone, mediated through digital platforms (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018). Pop culture today functions as a shared code that transcends borders (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013), becoming a new symbolic marker of contemporary society (Couldry and Hepp 2018). For instance, *Pokémon*—originating from Japan—has gained massive global attention. In the United States, *Pokémon* events draw large crowds, and its trading cards hold extraordinary monetary value in Western markets. This demonstrates how globalization and pop culture operate as an inseparable pair, producing global-scale impacts.

These two forces are then mediated by religion, through processes of appropriation and adaptation that ensure religious messages remain relevant and accessible to contemporary global audiences (Hjarvard 2008). Today, religion does not exist solely in mosques or other places of worship; it also circulates in popular media. Religious dissemination has become increasingly visual, narrative-driven, and global—a direct response to the fast-paced dynamics of social media, where religious content must compete with algorithmically privileged posts. As a result, religious discourse must adapt to the "market" to survive. In the logic of media systems, it is not media that adjusts

to religion, but religion that must adjust to the logic of media infrastructures created by digital platforms (Helland 2016; van Dijck and Poell 2013).

In the current era of global and social media, the boundaries between the sacred and the popular have become increasingly blurred (Hjarvard 2016). Pop culture is no longer dismissed as shallow or secular; it has become an interpretive tool. Many religious figures today use films, games, anime, music, and sports as anchors for conveying moral values. Pop culture provides a shared imagination, enabling religious messages to be more easily understood by global audiences. In his da'wah, SSR uses global symbols that allow his teachings to be received by diverse global communities and to become effectively borderless. More specifically, he employs pop culture as a shared language. SSR stands at the intersection of global pop culture, digital religion, and social media.

Methods

This article employs a descriptive, analytical, and exploratory cultural studies approach, focusing on understanding SSR's da'wah practices within the context of cultural globalization. The primary research method used is digital observation (Hine 2020) as an approach to studying digital practices through sustained, non-participatory observation of publicly available online content through which the study analyzes videos uploaded on SSR's official TikTok and Instagram accounts. In addition, user comments and interactions in the comment sections of each selected video are examined as a secondary layer of analysis to capture patterns of audience engagement and global reach.

To narrow and clarify the scope of the research, the analysis of SSR's content is limited to videos that reference or intersect with pop culture. Videos presenting purely religious material without any pop culture references are excluded. All analytical references are publicly available data accessible by anyone, at any time, from anywhere.

To support the observational method, two analytical techniques will be implemented. First, qualitative content analysis is used to identify patterns and themes and to examine how SSR transforms pop culture into moral and religious messages. This analysis follows an inductive approach, meaning that categories and conceptual labels are not predetermined but are instead drawn from the data as patterns become visible during the analytical process. Second, a cultural studies lens is applied to read pop culture as a cultural text and to observe how SSR employs it as a medium of da'wah, such as his use of Formula 1 references to articulate Islamic discourse.

Alongside these two techniques, the comment sections of each selected video are examined to identify geographic and religious diversity among commenters, traced through observable markers such as usernames, language use, and symbols displayed in their profiles. This comment-level observation captures only the participatory layer of the audience rather than passive consumers, and therefore does not aim to construct a demographic profile but to provide empirical support for the claim that SSR's content circulates beyond geographical and religious boundaries.

Based on the explanation above, the units of analysis used in this study are: pop culture references, SSR's videos, and the ways he integrates them with Islamic discourse, the forms and styles of his delivery, and their relation to the processes of globalization in both da'wah and culture. The study applies the following boundaries: the analysis is limited to 10 videos per platform, selected for their relevance to pop culture. Video selection relies on the "sort by popularity" feature on TikTok and Instagram Reels. No interviews or surveys are conducted, as the purpose of the study is to understand the phenomenon rather than to generalize SSR's da'wah model or audience responses.

Shaykh Salar Rasoul as A Case of Borderless Preaching

Shaykh Salar Rasoul (SSR) is an imam, preacher, and an active figure in Islamic engagement across both offline and online spaces. Originally Kurdish from the Kurdistan region, he completed his early education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, continued his studies in Turkey, and eventually settled in Canada. He has lived in Canada for more than 35 years and has spent over two decades involved in Islamic education and community work.

His academic background is remarkably diverse—ranging from education and engineering to Islamic studies—yet this breadth does not make him a rigid or distant figure. On the contrary, he presents a personable, engaging character that resonates with diverse demographic groups. This is evident from his combined following of more than 1 million users across short-form video platforms Instagram and TikTok.

While this figure is an accumulation, the details are even more impressive. According to data from socialblade.com, SSR has gained an average of more than 20,000 new Instagram followers per month in recent months. His followers come from all around the world—not only from North America, but also from Europe, Asia, and Australia. This demonstrates that his integration of pop culture into religious messaging serves as an effective tool for reaching global audiences.

His position becomes even more legitimate when viewed through the lens of his strategic roles and institutional involvement. He is the co-founder of the i3 Institute and currently serves as the Imam of Masjid Al-Ezz, the Director of Religious Affairs, and an Ambassador at Human Concern International. He has also been the principal of ISNA High School since 2005. His Islamic scholarship further reinforces his legitimacy, as he is a hafiz of the Qur'an and holds a formal academic education in Islamic studies. Together, these elements—his background, persona, and expertise—shape him into a preacher whose message is deeply engaging and widely resonant.

How Global Pop Culture Becomes Da'wah

At first glance, what SSR does may appear to be ordinary preaching that uses pop culture as an instrument of da'wah. However, the impact he generates goes far beyond merely answering absurd or playful questions posed by his followers. He becomes both an entertainer and a preacher.

Pop Culture as Transnational Currency and the Question of Preaching

Issues continually shape interactions among contemporary social media users, and the more global an issue is, the more people worldwide will participate in the conversation (Bruns and Highfield 2015). Compared to political conflicts or international disputes, entertainment-related topics are easier for global audiences to engage with (Wang and Lobato 2019). Their light and enjoyable nature makes interaction feel effortless, and this is precisely the role of pop culture in global communication. It functions as cultural currency and a shared reference that individuals across nearly any country can access (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013).

References such as *Beyblade*, *Formula 1*, *Minecraft*, *Ronaldo vs. Messi*, or *Barcelona vs. Real Madrid* have long surpassed geographical boundaries. They place the entire world within a single discursive space, shaped by collective perceptions arising from unrestricted flows of information (Jin 2017). The internet and social media have transformed pop culture into a form of global cultural literacy—a shared body of knowledge accessible to nearly everyone (Thussu 2018). Even if individual interests differ, people still absorb fragments of information about these cultural objects. Pop culture becomes a shared knowledge base of global society.

In traditional methods of da'wah, preachers typically rely on local ideas, idioms, or cultural references (Almila Akca et al. 2024). SSR, however, employs global symbols, allowing his message to remain untethered to any specific cultural context. By grounding his da'wah in global references, he speaks contextually without needing to elaborate on the background of the examples he uses.

Pop culture offers something that local culture cannot: expansive reach (Storey 2021; Tomlinson 1996). Because it is broad, heterogeneous, and ideologically neutral, religious messages delivered through pop culture references are more widely received and understood by diverse audiences. Listeners are not burdened by the need to understand a specific local context before grasping the message.

SSR often refers to objects or phenomena that almost everyone has encountered. Even if audiences have never played the game, watched the sport, or directly engaged with that form of pop culture, they generally know its form, system, or fundamental dynamics. This allows SSR to build instant connections without needing to "reconstruct context" for the audience.

Transforming Pop Culture Elements into Islamic Morals

In his uploaded videos, SSR answers questions submitted by his followers, and he responds by connecting the question to an Islamic moral or teaching. However, how does he integrate these elements? Findings from this study, after examining his videos, indicate a unique pattern in how he embeds Islamic values into the pop culture phenomena presented to him.

SSR uses an interactive video model in which he opens a Q&A box in his Instagram Stories; the questions submitted there serve as the basis for his short-form video content. All of his pop culture-related videos originate from these questions: he displays the question on screen, reads it aloud, and then provides his response. He does not create stand-alone sermon-style videos that

intentionally combine pop culture and Islamic discourse from the outset. Instead, the integration emerges organically through his reaction to the questions posed.

It remains unclear how he selects which questions to answer—whether there is a formal curation process, filtering mechanism, or topic check. We assume that some form of selection does occur, possibly conducted by his team or by SSR himself. This assumption is supported by his response to a question such as “Will I have my phone in Jannah?”, where part of his answer takes the form of a rap-like rhythmic bit: “Man, get off your screen, go back to your deen, stop to put the dopamine, so you can pass the *sirāt al-mustaqīm*, and don’t become a meme!” This response suggests that SSR is familiar with elements of contemporary pop culture, especially within the North American context.

He also displays familiarity with popular sports culture—basketball, ice hockey, and baseball—as evidenced by his responses to questions about those sports and by occasional footage of him participating in them. This strengthens the assumption that he is not disconnected from pop culture. However, there are also videos in which he openly admits he does not understand the context of certain references, suggesting that his team may have selected some questions. Thus, question selection appears to be flexible and dynamic.

What is remarkable, however, is not the selection process but SSR’s responses. He successfully turns pop culture into an emotional hook. His most-viewed videos consistently involve pop culture references, indicating that pop culture functions as an effective medium for engagement. His humorous, boomer-esque tone—often playfully contrasted with Gen Z and Gen Alpha sensibilities—helps construct an identity that is both interactive and endearing. This contributes significantly to why his persona resonates so widely across demographics.

The questions addressed by SSR are highly varied. However, those related to pop culture generally fall into two categories: questions framed as “Is it *haram/halal* to do A (action) within PC (a pop culture context)?” or “Is it *haram/halal* to engage in PC itself?” The variable A may refer to a religious action or a neutral action. Some questions reference pop culture in its entirety, to which SSR responds with an explicitly religious interpretation.

In responding to these questions, he answers freely according to the elements presented. If he does not know something, he openly states that he does not know—yet even then, he still finds a way to connect the question back to Islamic teachings. At the same time, many questions contain only pop culture elements or dynamics within a pop culture universe (“A in PC”). These often request his personal opinion, which he ultimately frames within a religious message. From these prompts, he identifies the relevant elements of the pop culture reference and then attaches a corresponding Islamic moral or teaching.

Throughout the analysis of SSR’s videos, a recurring pattern became visible in the way he connects pop culture to Islamic teachings. This pattern can be broken down into three observable steps. First, SSR identifies the pop culture element at hand, whether it is a game mechanic (such as spinning tops in Beyblade), a competitive dynamic (such as a team failing to support its drivers in Formula 1), or a cultural symbol (such as luxury car ownership). Second, he

draws out a transferable moral or ethical point from that element, for example, the permissibility of harmless play, the obligation of collective support, or the conditions of ethical consumption. Third, he reconnects that point to an established Islamic teaching, linking fair competition to the Prophetic encouragement of *ihsan* (excellence), or linking team cooperation to the ummah's collective responsibility against injustice.

This integration can be described as semantic bridging, a label inspired from Wierzbicka (1994) work on cross-cultural meaning transfer that refers to the linking or translating of meanings across different symbolic systems. In communication studies, semantic bridging helps connect "meaning spaces" in which symbols may be interpreted differently depending on interpretive frameworks, whether cultural frames, connotations, practices, or symbolic systems. The term is used here not as a pre-set analytical tool but as a label for the pattern that emerged inductively from the data. What SSR does is precisely this form of bridging: he transforms mechanisms into meanings, actions into ethics, and competition, whether success or failure, into forms of spiritual struggle.

It is worth noting that this bridging does not dilute core Islamic principles. SSR's moral conclusions consistently trace back to recognizable Islamic ethical foundations, from Prophetic teachings and principles of *halal* and *haram* to obligations of charity and honest livelihood. His conclusions are not invented to fit the pop culture reference; rather, they reflect established moral positions within Islamic tradition. Even when responding to absurd or humorous questions, his answers remain anchored to normative Islamic discourse. This is what distinguishes his approach from mere entertainment: the pop culture reference serves as the vehicle, but the destination remains grounded in Islamic moral tradition.

He reinterprets pop culture through a moral lens, whether he agrees with it, disagrees with it, is unfamiliar with it, or remains neutral. The humorous and absurd questions posed by his followers serve as vehicles for conveying lessons on intention, discipline, and self-control, and as reminders to remain realistic and grounded in prescribed religious teachings. He does more than quote pop culture; he reframes it, corrects misconceptions, and effectively "Islamicizes" the narrative.

The Pop Culture Case

One of SSR's most memorable videos begins with the question: "Is Lamborghini *halal*?" The video appears on the viewer's feed and is addressed directly to an imam—whose username, shaykhrasoul, clearly signals that he is a religious authority. SSR, sitting inside a green Lamborghini Urus, responds: "Bro, as long as your money is *halal*, you're paying your taxes, you're giving to charity..."—before his voice is abruptly drowned out by the roaring rev of the car's engine.

For a religious authority, this is a highly unusual way to answer a question. Riding in a Lamborghini and flooring the gas pedal while giving a ruling is not a conventional act of preaching. However, SSR does not offer a judgmental response; instead, he frames his answer around themes of goodness and ethical responsibility rather than strict religiosity. His message is simple, accessible, and

universally understandable: as long as one earns honestly, fulfils civic duties, and upholds obligations as a Muslim, one is free to own a Lamborghini.

The comment section is equally fascinating. On Instagram, negative comments are sporadic. Users respond as if the video were entertainment or a meme rather than a traditional religious lecture. The commenters are not exclusively Muslim; many accounts display crosses or other non-Islamic symbols in their bios. This indicates that SSR's content circulates far beyond a Muslim audience, aided by the neutrality and universality of pop culture symbols.

SSR's content also reveals his substantial familiarity with Formula 1 racing. Many of his videos respond to F1-related questions. For instance, when asked, "Shaykh, do you believe in Ferrari?" he answers:

Well... guys... man, today is just a free practice, mate. It wasn't even qualifying. So relax! Chill! Yeah, you can have hope in Ferrari, but you know what? Having hope in any human being, you're always gonna be let down. But when you hope in Allah, you're never let down. So have hope in Allah, and you can believe in Ferrari—or in a fairy.

Here, he addresses the pop culture question sincerely while concluding with a contextual religious reminder. This assimilation of both elements animates the comment section. One user (@xycryy17) writes: "Let us be delusional sheikh 🤔🙄." This illustrates how SSR's religious message is received lightly, prompting equally playful responses. Another user echoes SSR's message while referencing Max Verstappen: "I believe in Allah and Prophet Muhammad SAW, but my Max will win this race." The blend of humor, fandom, and affirmation of faith exemplifies SSR's ability to embed Islamic messages within pop cultural ecosystems.

However, when sorting SSR's Instagram and TikTok accounts by "most popular," one video stands out across both platforms: "Is it *haram* to play Beyblade?" SSR responds with an exasperated expression and tone, as though weary of receiving such questions:

Yo, what's *haram* about Beyblade, man? You just spin that thing and let it hit the other thing until one of you dies. Like— which part of that is *haram*, man? Just don't bet on it! Okay! Betting is *haram*! But just Beyblade all you want, man.

Unsurprisingly, this video has earned over one million likes on each platform. His delivery—equal parts humorous, sincere, and culturally fluent—demonstrates his closeness to pop culture. The comment sections are filled with equally light-hearted replies, often from users around the world. Many commenters do not explicitly state their nationality or identity, but brief profile checks reveal a wide international distribution. The result is that SSR's comment sections function as global meeting spaces where diverse viewers feel connected to his content and entertained by his responses.

There are many other examples of such interactions, but the pattern remains consistent. Moreover, despite the repetitive nature of some questions, SSR's high engagement levels show that his approach continues to resonate with global audiences.

Modifying Islamic Concepts Through Familiar Symbols

In his da'wah practice, SSR simplifies Islamic teachings by aligning them with recognizable pop culture contexts. He frames Islamic concepts through the lens of popular dramas, conflicts, trends, or well-known figures circulating in public discourse. Pop culture also functions as an entry point that draws viewers' curiosity about how SSR will respond. One can easily imagine the intrigue generated when a video appears on a user's feed with captions such as "Is Lamborghini *halal*?" or "Do you think it will be Ferrari's year next year? (F1)"—questions presented alongside the image of a middle-aged man wearing a kufi and sporting a full beard. The contrast alone is compelling enough to make viewers continue watching, especially compared to typical social media influencers who focus exclusively on Formula 1 content.

SSR's responses—sometimes serious, sometimes frustrated, and at other times humorous—also enhance the stickiness of his da'wah content. His style makes the videos engaging and widely shareable. Moreover, these forms of content can cross boundaries of faith; non-Muslims also consume SSR's videos precisely because pop culture symbols do not carry inherent religious identities. As a result, his messages can become universal and borderless.

Yet the very quality that makes SSR's content borderless also raises a question about how such blending affects the perception of religious authority itself. In the traditional Islamic framework, authority is conferred through recognized chains of scholarly transmission, formal training in classical Islamic sciences, and credentials such as the *ijazah*, which certifies the competence of a student as verified by an established scholar (Grewal 2014; Zaman 2010). SSR holds these credentials: he is a *hafiz* of the Qur'an, has formal academic education in Islamic studies, and has studied under various scholars. However, his digital presence foregrounds a different kind of legitimacy, one built on communicative skill, humor, cultural proximity, and a persona that feels authentic and relatable to global audiences (Hjarvard 2016).

In Western preaching contexts, this tension takes on particular significance. Muslim communities in these settings often navigate between locally trained imams whose authority rests on institutional roles and scholarly pedigree, and digitally prominent figures whose influence is driven by visibility and engagement on social media platforms (Campbell and Tsuria 2021; Grewal 2014). SSR occupies a unique position at this intersection: he holds the traditional markers of scholarly legitimacy while simultaneously constructing authority through the language of pop culture and the rhythms of short-form video. This dual positioning allows his pop culture-infused da'wah to function without the risk of being dismissed as lacking scholarly grounding, precisely because his traditional credentials remain intact. At the same time, his willingness to engage with absurd questions from a Lamborghini or through references to Beyblade challenges the conventional image of what a credentialed religious authority should look and sound like. Rather than undermining his scholarly standing, this approach expands the communicative range of what traditional authority can do when it intersects with digital charisma (Hjarvard 2008).

Borderless Preaching: How Digital Media Amplifies the Message

Social media platforms enable SSR's da'wah to transcend geographical boundaries instantly. Content no longer struggles to find an audience (Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013); its unrestricted circulation allows it to gain visibility and engagement more easily (Highfield 2017). The incorporation of pop culture references enhances the cross-cultural readability of SSR's messages among viewers worldwide.

His videos attract comments from users in many countries. For instance, his video about Roblox received a flood of comments from Indonesian users, reflecting the game's rising popularity there. Moreover, his playful tone—even when delivering religious insights—makes his content widely accessible regardless of cultural background. Pop culture enhances SSR's visibility and engagement precisely because it is not confined by ethnicity or geography.

Given this format, SSR's videos are often more entertaining than traditional religious preaching. His assimilation of pop culture renders his content modern and relevant, reflected in comment sections filled with users of different ages and from diverse regions. Over time, these comment threads form a sense of global community, where viewers interact across borders through shared pop culture references and religious reflections.

Tensions and Limitations

However, this does not mean that such content is without limitations or potential tensions in the interpretation of religious messages. Excessive simplification of religious teachings may lead to shallow or overly general understandings (Campbell 2012). Although his messages are typically clear, treating SSR's content strictly as formal da'wah risks overlooking his broader role as a communicator of ethical values that resonate across heterogeneous global audiences.

There is also the possibility of misunderstandings when the pop culture references used originate from controversial or morally ambiguous contexts. SSR must therefore maintain a careful balance between entertainment, moral substance, and religious instruction. This balance is crucial to ensuring that he does not become overly absorbed into the logic of social media culture, and that he remains anchored to the moral compass expected of a religious authority conveying messages of goodness and ethical guidance.

Islam, Globalization, And Changing Forms of Preaching

According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), modern global cultural flows consist of five landscapes—ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes—each operating within its own corridor. SSR's work is situated primarily within the mediascape, the domain in which images, information, narratives, and representations are produced and circulated through mass media and digital platforms. SSR becomes part of this global digital media flow through his da'wah content, and he employs pop culture—also a product of the mediascape—as both medium and message. Within the borderless structure of social media, SSR uses this mediascape to unite diverse publics through his

preaching. He adopts global symbols, reframes them into niche Islamic messages, and redistributes them to a global audience.

Religion is no longer positioned outside modernity; it exists within the currents of global digital culture (Hjarvard 2016). Religious understanding today is more heterogeneous due to the volume and speed of information circulation (Campbell and Tsuria 2021). Non-Muslims are now familiar with concepts like *halal* and *haram* (Temporal 2011), making the content in SSR's videos accessible to the general public without symbolic barriers. His da'wah demonstrates the capacity of Islam—and of SSR himself—to negotiate with the space of global cultural flows.

Historically, da'wah was dominated by sermon-like speech, whether delivered in physical settings (mosques, study circles, religious gatherings) or in digital formats that merely reproduced these traditional forms (Brinton 2015). Contemporary da'wah, however, is more compact and concise, often condensed into a single short video delivered in meme-like formats with pop culture references (Campbell 2012). In presenting himself this way, SSR can be categorized as a digital native—someone who is not only active online but whose preaching style is shaped by the rhythms and norms of digital culture.

SSR also illustrates how the classification of religious authority on social media has shifted more broadly. As noted earlier in the context of his pop culture-driven content, SSR holds traditional scholarly credentials while simultaneously constructing a form of legitimacy rooted in communicative skill, cultural proximity, and a relatable persona. What this dual positioning reveals at a broader level is that the criteria for religious authority are no longer confined to scholarly qualifications alone. On social media, authority is also built through relatability and cultural fluency, expressed through warmth, humor, and emotional closeness. SSR's content conveys that spiritual meaning can emerge from unexpected sources, from video games, sports culture, or youthful cultural trends, allowing his da'wah to be readable to diverse publics and to serve as a bridge between Islam and broader society.

Traditional discourse often assumes that Islam's encounter with modernity results in tension or conflict. However, SSR demonstrates the opposite: with creativity, Islam and modernity can interact harmoniously and showcase the religion's flexibility toward diverse cultural forms. This transition is crucial for maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing cultural landscape shaped by globalization.

SSR's model establishes a new benchmark for future religious authorities, who must increasingly master the languages of religion, culture, and digital media simultaneously—all while remaining grounded in ethical, moral, and ritual principles. This multimodal fluency enables religious messages to reach beyond localized communities and scale to a global audience. In the future, bridging cultural gaps between religious authorities and their audiences will become essential, especially as pop culture—sports, humor, gaming, anime, and more—continues to normalize itself within everyday life. Religious authorities will have no option but to accommodate these shifts. Da'wah will no longer be confined to internal communal interactions; it will become more global, borderless, and heterogeneous.

Globalization does not destroy religion; it becomes destructive only when religious authorities fail to accommodate, affirm, or assimilate it thoughtfully. The same applies to pop culture, which initially appears as a potential challenge but can be transformed into a powerful tool for da'wah. SSR demonstrates how Islam can remain relevant and communicative in the globalized era by harnessing the universal language of pop culture to convey timeless moral messages.

Conclusion

The analysis of Shaykh Salar Rasoul's digital presence demonstrates how globalization and pop culture can reshape the landscape of contemporary Islamic preaching. SSR's da'wah exemplifies how religious messaging can thrive within global mediascapes by employing universally recognizable symbols drawn from entertainment culture. Rather than resisting modernity or distancing himself from popular media, SSR embraces these cultural forms, translating them into accessible moral and spiritual lessons for heterogeneous global audiences. His technique—rooted in humor, relatability, and semantic bridging—enables Islamic teachings to reach beyond local communities and circulate across borders, engaging Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

While this approach carries the risk of oversimplifying complex religious concepts, SSR maintains a balance between entertainment and religious integrity, reaffirming Islam's adaptability in rapidly evolving digital environments. His model signifies a shift in religious authority, where communicative skill, cultural literacy, and authenticity complement traditional scholarship. Ultimately, SSR's work illustrates that globalization does not diminish religion; instead, when thoughtfully integrated, it extends the reach and relevance of religious messages. Pop culture becomes not a threat, but a powerful vehicle through which da'wah can flourish in the borderless, interconnected world.

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