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Linguistic Markers, Visibility, and Symbolic Commodification in the Short Da'wah Videos of Aagym Official on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses patterns of linguistic markers in the short videos of the Aagym Official channel and their association with visibility, using symbolic commodification as an interpretive frame. The analysis draws on the Tri Linguistic Program, a preliminary framework that sorts markers into normative reasoning, engagement, and transcendental narrative. It is a qualitative single-case study of the metadata of twenty videos, verbatim transcripts of five purposively selected videos, and interviews with four audience informants. The results show two message arrangements. The three high-visibility videos contain pacing, experiential anchoring, and transcendental narrative without normative reasoning, whereas the two comparison videos contain normative reasoning without pacing. Transcendental narrative appears in all five videos, prominent in the high-visibility videos and weak in the comparison videos. No explicit normative ground is found in the key sentence of any video. Because monetisation and production data are unavailable, commodification is not a judgement of the channel managers' intentions. The findings are associative, entangled with topical differences, and need to be tested on a larger corpus and against long-form sermons.

Keywords: *message form of da'wah; linguistic markers; short video; visibility; symbolic commodification; religious authority*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary religious practice takes place within media structures that help determine the form of the message. Hjarvard (2013) describes this condition as the mediatization of religion, in which media logic shapes how religious messages are composed, circulated, and interpreted. Campbell (2010; see also Campbell & Tsuria, 2021) adds that digital religion is the outcome of negotiation between established religious traditions and the requirements of new technologies, rather than a mere transfer of sermons onto screens. In Indonesia, Rohmawati, Zulkifli, and Hakiem (2024) show that mediatization and hypermediation have changed

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how Muslims understand and practise their religion, giving rise to hybrid spaces that merge online and offline activity, in line with Evolvi's (2022) discussion of hybrid mediated online religious spaces.

The shift becomes sharper when the short-video format becomes the main vehicle for circulating da'wah messages. A short duration demands condensed ideas, topics that can be completed in a single viewing, and openings capable of holding attention in the first seconds. Bunt (2009) notes that the internet opened the way for new interpreters of Islam who gain influence through digital visibility rather than institutional recognition. Zaid et al. (2022) show that Muslim social media influencers reorder religious authority by relying on storytelling skills and closeness to their audiences. Rachman, Saumantri, and Hidayatulloh (2025) likewise argue that social media da'wah moves religious authority away from traditional scholars and institutions toward popularity-driven figures, a shift accompanied by fragmented teaching and the commercialisation of religion, and Ardiansyah et al. (2025) show that lay preachers in Indonesia build influence through digital performance, emotional storytelling, and audience engagement rather than scholarly credentials. Kerim et al. (2025) map influential online preachers in Kazakhstan, which shows that the phenomenon is not limited to the Indonesian context. The Aagym Official channel, the official channel of the founder of the Daarut Tauhiid Islamic boarding school (pesantren) in Bandung, merits attention because it represents an established pesantren institution yet applies the same content-production practices as digital creators in general.

The short-video format brings rules of the game that differ from earlier da'wah media. Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström (2022) explain that short video fosters production practices centred on the first few seconds, because that is the point at which viewers decide to stay or scroll. Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy (2021) add that content must be made platform-ready in order to circulate, and that this requirement in turn affects how content is produced. Bhandari and Bimo (2022) show that the algorithms of short-video platforms help shape how users present themselves, so that the form of a message is not entirely determined by its speaker. In the same vein, Alam et al. (2025) show that platform recommendation and engagement systems can amplify particular preaching content and potentially sideline other voices, which makes visibility a matter of platform design as well as of the preacher. Subahri and Rachman (2026) show that a TikTok account can reconstruct normative teaching by blending it with regional traditions, symbols, and languages. For da'wah institutions, these demands run up against habits of delivery that take time, namely stating the grounds, spelling out the conditions, and closing the argument. The tension between the two has received little examination at the level of linguistic units, even though that is where the adjustment is first visible.

Studies of Islamic sermon discourse offer an important point of comparison for this reading. Gaffney (1994) examined sermons in Egypt and showed that the position of the speaker is part of the rhetorical work of the sermon itself. Hirschkind (2006) showed that cassette sermons shape listeners' ethical dispositions through the way they listen, not only through what is said. Millie (2017) depicted Sundanese preachers in West Java as performers who arrange both the performance and the way it is heard, while Hew (2018) examined visual persuasion in online da'wah. Rahman, Mashuri, and Nurdin (2023) examined the use of rapport, metaphor, nested loops, and chunking in the sermons of one ustaz and found that these techniques increased the reception of the message. Raya (2024) adds that the packaging and persuasion of celebrity preachers in Indonesia follow a similar pattern. Taufikin, Nurhayati, and Muhajarah (2025) report that a popular preacher's concise, humour-driven TikTok style engages younger audiences but also provokes debate over doctrinal accuracy, which points to a tension between accessibility and theological depth. These studies indicate that the three-dimensional framework proposed below must be compared with the Islamic rhetorical tradition, not only with the distinctions of Western rhetoric.

Several other studies highlight the economic side of digital da'wah. Mufadil, Mujib, and Rustandi (2022) found that entertaining skills, symbolic da'wah design, and the personification of the preacher function as commodification techniques on da'wah YouTube channels. Nisa (2024) likewise treats da'wah on YouTube as a monetisable product shaped by algorithms and market demands, and Mukhroman, Muhtadi, Mukarom, and Turmudi (2026), drawing on Mosco's commodification theory, argue that content, audiences, and preachers themselves become forms of market-driven spiritual labour. Nawaf (2025) shows that preachers' personal branding proceeds alongside the negotiation of religious authority through audience interaction. Ramdani, Harianto, and Saefulloh (2025) read similar phenomena through culture industry theory. Muary, Susanti, and Atikah (2024) show that the digitalisation of Salafi da'wah is supported by political-economic calculation as well as by adaptation to local culture. Zaenuri (2025) shows that the reception of digital da'wah is also determined by how tuan guru interpret the medium themselves. Other studies examine the framing of da'wah messages on YouTube (Nasution & Alisya, 2024), the diversity of da'wah communication on digital channels (Muchtar, Rustandi, & Gunawan, 2023), and audiences' tendencies in using social media (Saaidun & Ibrahim, 2025). Taken together, these studies show that digital da'wah engages with market logic and that language plays a role in its success.

This body of research leaves one problem. Studies of commodification tend to rest on the economic structure of the media, content packaging, and the

management of the preacher's image, whereas studies of linguistic strategy tend to rest on persuasive effectiveness. In the studies reviewed here, the two have not been brought together at the level of linguistic units. Mosco (2009) emphasises that commodification works through a process that converts use value into exchange value, and Kitiarsa (2008) shows that religious symbols can circulate in the cultural market without losing their religious appearance. Couldry (2012) adds that media systems produce symbolic value by determining which actors and narratives receive public attention. Einstein (2008) places the management of identity and symbolic association at the core of religious branding. In the Indonesian context, Fealy (2008) reads the commodification of Islam as part of the aspirational pietism of the middle class, and Hoesterey (2015) examines Aa Gym as a self-help religious figure packaged as a brand.

The gap that remains unanswered therefore lies in the linguistic patterns at the level of the message unit that can be linked to visibility. This article first reads those patterns as an adjustment of message form, and then interprets them through symbolic commodification, that is, the possibility that counted audience attention becomes the measure of a message's success and that message form is adjusted to the requirements of such circulation. The study does not measure income or financial gain and contains no monetisation or production data, so economic exchange value is not demonstrated. Nor is the assessment in this article directed at the intentions, sincerity, or decisions of the channel managers or of KH Abdullah Gymnastiar as a person. What is assessed is the pattern of language in publicly available texts, and the term commodification is used as an interpretive frame, not as an accusation.

This study proposes the Tri Linguistic Program as a preliminary analytical framework for reading these patterns. The framework sorts linguistic markers into three dimensions. The first is the dimension of normative reasoning (Science Linguistic Program, SLP), that is, language arrangements that provide a basis for judgement that can be examined outside the speaker's feelings, whether in the form of rational reasoning, scholarly reference, or fiqh argument. The word science is used in the sense of ilmu, or scholarship, not empirical science. Because SLP is defined as reasoning or reference that can be examined, its absence in videos that contain no reference is partly definitional. The meaningful finding is not the absence itself but where legitimacy is placed when no reference is present.

The second is the engagement dimension (Neuro Linguistic Program, NLP), that is, linguistic markers that build closeness and emotional engagement, such as pacing, experiential anchoring, and directing. The term is rooted in Bandler and Grinder (1975) and has been used in studies of sermons (Rahman et al., 2023) and language teaching (Rustan, 2022), while its scientific status as a theory has been critically examined (Hajiyeva, 2022). This article does not use NLP

as a therapeutic theory or as a claim about how the brain works. Because the label is scientifically problematic, this dimension is called engagement markers throughout the analytical discussion, and the abbreviation NLP is retained only as the name of a dimension in the framework so that its marker categories (pacing, framing, directing) can still be traced to the literature of origin. Use of the name does not imply that NLP is valid as a theory. The word program is likewise retained only as the name of the framework, to refer to a series of recurring linguistic choices that can be pointed to in the text, and is not used as a separate analytical concept.

The third is the transcendental narrative dimension (Maha Linguistic Program, MLP), that is, the renaming of experience and inner states in transcendental terms that bring spiritual depth of meaning. Transcendental expressions are almost always present in Islamic sermons, so the presence of MLP in a video alone is uninformative. What is analysed is therefore its prominence and function in the key sentence, not merely whether it is present.

SLP is close to logos and NLP is close to pathos in the classical distinction of rhetoric (Aristotle, 2007), but MLP does not align with ethos. Ethos, that is, the credibility of the speaker, is not made a dimension of its own in this framework. This exclusion proved costly, because the strongest finding in the corpus concerns the authority of the speaker (see the section Religious Authority and Audience Attachment). This marks the framework as incomplete. The Tri Linguistic Program is thus affirmed as a preliminary analytical construct that has been tested on only five videos, not as an established theory. Its contribution lies in reading the three dimensions through a single lens so that the patterns of presence and absence of each can be compared, and in the possibility of linking those patterns to an interpretation of symbolic commodification.

This study aims to explain the pattern of message composition in the short videos of the Aagym Official channel and its relation to visibility. Three questions are posed. First, how are markers of normative reasoning, engagement, and transcendental narrative arranged across the message units of five videos, and what differences in arrangement appear between high- and low-visibility videos? Second, how are the basis of legitimacy and audience reception read from four informants? Third, to what extent can the pattern be interpreted through symbolic commodification, and what limits attach to that interpretation given the absence of monetisation and production data?

METHOD

The study uses a qualitative approach with a single-case design. Operationally, its procedure is closer to a qualitative content analysis of linguistic markers with

theoretical interpretation, and it does not apply Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional critical discourse analysis in full. The text dimension is analysed only through coding markers in the transcripts of five videos, without examining modality, transitivity, and cohesion. The discursive practice dimension is reached only on the distribution and consumption side, that is, the metadata of twenty videos and the reception of four informants; the production side can be inferred only indirectly from the text because the study did not reach the channel's production team. The social practice dimension is read through the context of mediatization and the channel's position in the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren ecosystem, and because it is not supported by separate data, its interpretation is tentative. Questions of power and ideology are only touched upon. Fairclough's (2013) framework is thus used as a map for reading, as Fairclough (1993) read the influence of market logic on varieties of discourse, and not as a full analytical procedure. On-screen text is read as a separate multimodal channel (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The amount of data is limited and the study makes no claim of saturation, so its findings are read as an in-depth account of one case, not as a generalisation.

A note on terms is needed for consistency. A marker means a linguistic unit that can be pointed to in the text. A code means the result of coding NLP-category markers and normative exhortation in a message unit, with nineteen codes in total. A feature means a formal characteristic measured directly without coding, such as the second at which the first proposition is completed. Words is used only for counts of spoken words. The terms are used as follows: science is read as scholarship (ilmu), neuro as engagement, and maha as transcendental; the NLP categories are named pacing, experiential anchoring, framing, frame shifting, and directing; and high visibility is used for the group of videos with a high view rate.

The object of the study is the Aagym Official channel, the official channel of KH Abdullah Gymnastiar, the founder and central figure of the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren in Bandung. Throughout the study period, this channel was the only channel within the institution that continuously produced short videos, whereas the channels of other media units stopped midway through the period and belonged to a separate business entity. All short videos uploaded between 9 August 2025 and 2 August 2026 were listed as the sampling frame and yielded twenty videos of 42 to 59 seconds in duration. Metadata were retrieved on 24 August 2026 and cover view counts, likes, comments, upload date, and duration. Likes and comments data were recorded but are not analysed in this article.

Because older videos naturally accumulate more views, visibility is measured by the daily view rate, that is, the number of views divided by the number of days since upload. In the frame of twenty videos, the lowest rate is 89 and the highest is 41,832 views per day, with a median of 2,726. The first tercile boundary falls at

276 views per day and the second at 10,589 views per day, yielding seven videos in the top tercile, six in the middle tercile, and seven in the bottom tercile. The middle tercile was excluded to sharpen the contrast between groups. This measure has limitations, because newly uploaded videos tend to show a higher daily rate owing to an initial surge, and the metadata were retrieved 22 days after the last upload.

The corpus consists of five videos selected purposively on the basis of contrast in view rate. The three high-visibility videos are VT-01 with a rate of 22,735, VT-02 with 25,443, and VT-03 with 24,197 views per day. They are not the three highest rates, because the highest rate in the frame reaches 41,832. The two comparison videos are VR-01 with a rate of 513 and VR-04 with 180 views per day.

One deviation is stated openly. VR-01 actually lies in the middle tercile and by procedure should have been excluded, but it was retained because a complete verbatim transcript from the bottom tercile was available for only one video, whereas the comparison requires at least two observations on the low side. As a result, the comparison group includes only one video from the bottom tercile (VR-04), and the contrast reported is weaker than originally designed. The lowest rate in the high group is indeed 44 times the highest rate in the comparison group, with no intermediate value in the corpus, but this contrast is descriptive and not the result of a statistical test.

Each video was transcribed in three tracks, namely timestamps, spoken utterance, and on-screen text. Separating the on-screen text track is necessary because part of the message in short video is carried by writing on the screen that is not always the same as the spoken utterance. The transcripts were then segmented into three message units, namely the opening, the key sentence containing the core religious proposition, and the call to action, while utterances outside these three were recorded as context units. Four informants, coded P-01 to P-04, were interviewed using coded clips as stimuli. Variation among informants was sought along three axes, namely intensity of exposure, institutional closeness, and attitude toward the content, with critical informants deliberately sought so that the findings would be tested against voices that do not resonate.

Coding was applied to NLP-category markers and normative exhortation, with six categories in the codebook: pacing (acknowledgement of the audience's feelings using pronouns that include the speaker), experiential anchoring (linking a proposition to sensory imagery or to the audience's everyday situations, excluding figurative expressions that have become fixed in everyday use), framing, frame shifting (a change of perspective through explicit contrast), and directing (sequential instructions marked by immediacy), plus normative exhortation. SLP

and MLP markers were not coded but read interpretively in the key sentence. The codebook contains five NLP categories but only one normative category, so the number of codes across groups is partly a consequence of codebook design and is not compared as an average.

Coding reliability was checked through double coding during the codebook pilot stage. The check yielded nine agreed codes, three additional codes, and one correction of quotation placement. The three additional codes were all markers missed in the first coding, not markers whose meaning was disputed. No intercoder agreement statistic was calculated. The entire corpus was then recoded by consensus, so independent agreement on the final corpus cannot be assessed, and coding reliability must be read as limited. All videos analysed were uploaded publicly and are quoted for the purpose of analysis. The assessment in this article is directed at patterns of language and message form, not at the intentions or sincerity of the speaker. Informants are given codes to preserve anonymity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of Markers across the Three Dimensions

Coding of the five videos yielded nineteen codes covering NLP markers and normative exhortation. SLP and MLP markers were read interpretively in the key sentence and are not counted in the code matrix. The three dimensions therefore do not rest on an equivalent data basis, and no claim about their integration is made; what is reported is the presence and location of each. The engagement dimension piles up in the high-visibility videos, the normative reasoning dimension appears only in the comparison group, and the transcendental dimension is present in all five videos with differing prominence. Its prominence is high in the key sentences of the three high-visibility videos, weak in VR-01, and not prominent in VR-04. The distribution of markers is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of Markers across the Three Dimensions in the Five Corpus Videos

Video (daily rate)	Normative reasoning (SLP)	Engagement (NLP)	Transcendental narrative (MLP)
VT-01 (22,735)	None	Pacing, experiential anchoring; frame shifting; directing in the on-screen text and closing	A question about suffering is replaced by the will of God

Video (daily rate)	Normative reasoning (SLP)	Engagement (NLP)	Transcendental narrative (MLP)
VT-02 (25,443)	None	Pacing and experiential anchoring in the opening; experiential anchoring, framing, and frame shifting in the key sentence; directing	Emptiness of the heart as an alarm from God; zikrullah as food for the spirit
VT-03 (24,197)	None	Pacing, experiential anchoring; frame shifting; directing	Lying robs one of tranquillity and distances God's help
VR-01 (513)	Quotation of prayer text in the context unit; normative exhortation	Not found; framing only	Weak: devotional concentration (khusyuk) linked to the content of the petition
VR-04 (180)	Condition–consequence reasoning, reference to fiqh law; normative exhortation	Not found; framing only	Not prominent; validity judged by legal standards

Source: Results of coding the verbatim transcripts of the five corpus videos, processed by the researchers. Markers in each cell are read in order by message unit, namely the opening, the key sentence, then the call to action. SLP and MLP markers are read interpretively; only NLP markers and normative exhortation are coded

Table 1 shows a clear division on four categories. Pacing, experiential anchoring, frame shifting, and directing are not found in either comparison video, whereas each of the three high-visibility videos contains at least four such codes. Normative exhortation appears only in the comparison group. Framing appears in one of the three high-visibility videos (VT-02) and in both comparison videos, so it does not help separate the two groups. The number of codes per video (five in VT-01, six in VT-02, four in VT-03, and two in each comparison video) is not compared as an average, because the difference partly stems from the codebook design. The comparison is made on the presence of categories. In these five videos, pacing and its kind are not present together with normative exhortation and reasoning.

Normative Reasoning: Where Legitimacy Lies without a Textual Basis

Normative reasoning in this corpus appears as fiqh argument and legal reference, not as empirical scientific reference. In religious sermons, reasoning of this kind most often appears as fiqh argument. Its form is clearest in VR-04, whose key

sentence states that if ritual purification (taharah) does not fulfil its pillars and conditions, then under fiqh law the prayer performed is invalid even if the person feels devout (khusyuk). The sentence builds a condition–consequence relation, openly names the framework of assessment, and then rejects personal feeling as the measure of validity. The closing is consistent, namely an exhortation to study fiqh carefully and to re-study the fiqh books. VR-01 takes a similar path by quoting the text of a prayer in the context unit and then recommending memorisation of its meaning.

The most prominent finding on this dimension is an absence. Not one of the five key sentences states a normative basis explicitly, whether a quotation of a verse, a hadith, or the opinion of a particular scholar. The closest is VR-04, which mentions fiqh law, but that reference points to a field of scholarship and not to a specific basis. In VR-01 the text of the prayer is indeed quoted, but the quotation sits in the context unit, so the core proposition is delivered without being tied to the text. In the three high-visibility videos, no tie to a text appears. Legitimacy in these videos seems to rest on the speaker's personal authority and on the fit between the message and the audience's experience.

This absence must be read carefully. The corpus contains no long sermons from the same channel as a baseline comparison, so the absence of scriptural evidence (dalil) in videos of 42 to 59 seconds cannot be distinguished from the nature of the short genre. VR-04 shows that normative reasoning can be accommodated in the same duration, but one example is not enough to conclude that the authorisation of the message shifts from text to speaker. The only defensible claim is that an explicit normative basis is absent from the key sentence in this format, and that the authorisation of the message in high-visibility videos is tied to experience the audience recognises.

Engagement Markers and the Division of Labour across Channels

The engagement dimension is present with a regular distribution by message unit. In the opening, the dominant marker is pacing, in the form of acknowledging the audience's feelings with pronouns that include the speaker. VT-01 opens by asking whether we have ever felt tired and tight in the chest when facing a heavy trial. VT-02 opens by admitting that there are times when the heart feels dry and empty even though nothing is lacking materially. VT-03 opens by stating that we are often afraid to be honest because we fear being scolded, fear loss, or fear losing our position. Experiential anchoring accompanies these through sensory imagery and everyday work situations.

In the key sentence, the marker shifts to frame shifting, marked by explicit contrast, such as VT-02's statement that food for the spirit is not money but zikrullah, and VT-03's statement that honesty may cost a person something in this

world but lying certainly robs the heart of tranquillity. In the call to action, the marker changes to directing, in the form of sequential instructions marked by immediacy. In both comparison videos, pacing and experiential anchoring are not found, because both open with a standard greeting and then announce the topic.

One finding emerges from separating the transcript tracks. In VT-01, the spoken opening consists entirely of pacing, but its on-screen text is a command that viewers stop asking why they are the ones being tested. Directing is therefore already at work in the very first second through the visual channel and precedes the spoken directing that appears only in the call to action. Two channels carry different persuasive functions within the same unit, and the audience receives both simultaneously. This division of labour between channels is not available in the vocabulary of NLP categories commonly used in studies of sermons, so it becomes visible only because the transcripts were arranged in three tracks. This finding is in line with attention to visual persuasion in online da'wah (Hew, 2018).

Transcendental Narrative as Meaning-Giver

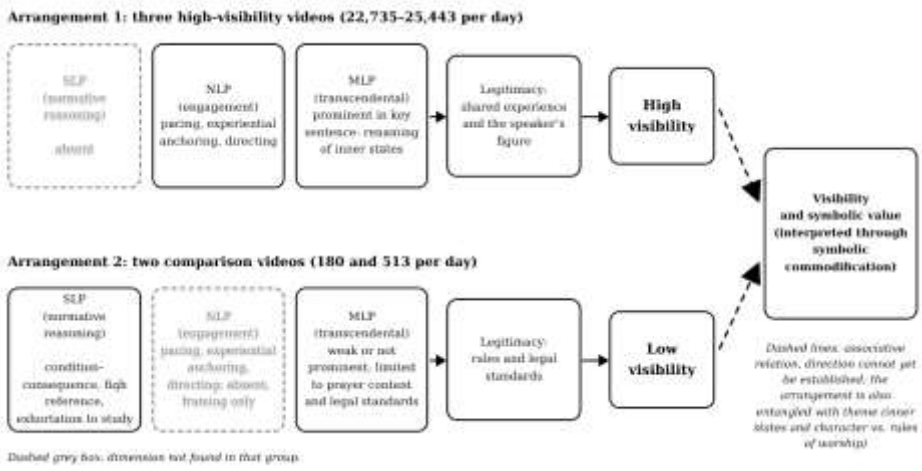
The transcendental dimension occupies the key sentence of all three high-visibility videos and works by renaming inner states in transcendental terms. VT-01 turns the question about one's own suffering into a question about what God wills through the event. VT-02 calls the emptiness of the heart an alarm from God and then positions zikrullah as food for the spirit. VT-03 states that lying robs the heart of tranquillity and distances God's help. All three move the standard of judgement from worldly consequences to the relationship with God without passing through a quotation of text. The mapping from the bodily domain to the inner domain in VT-02 is a near-canonical example of conceptual metaphor at work (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Transcendental narrative here functions as a meaning-giver, not as scriptural evidence.

In the comparison videos, this dimension is weaker. VR-01 links devotional concentration to the content of the petition, whereas in VR-04 the dimension is not prominent because the validity of prayer is judged by legal standards. Because transcendental expressions are common in Islamic sermons, the presence of this dimension in all five videos does not distinguish the groups. What distinguishes them is its prominence in the key sentence and its function as a meaning-giver without a tie to text.

This pattern shows that the three dimensions are not combined cumulatively in this corpus. The high-visibility videos contain engagement markers in the opening and closing and transcendental narrative in the key sentence, without normative reasoning. The comparison videos contain normative reasoning in the key sentence and normative exhortation in the closing, without pacing. The first arrangement moves the message from feeling to meaning

and then to action, whereas the second moves from topic to rule and then to an exhortation to study. The difference concerns how the message is composed as a discursive practice, not the depth of its content (Fairclough, 2013).

The two arrangements are entangled with theme. All three high-visibility videos address inner states and moral character (life's trials, an empty heart, honesty), whereas both comparison videos address rules of worship (ritual purification and prayer). The arrangement could simply reflect theme, since discussion of inner states commonly uses experience and transcendental language, whereas rules of worship commonly use rules. The phrase mutually exclusive is therefore used here only as a description that the two arrangements do not occur together in the five videos, not as a general rule. With this design, the effect of language choice cannot be separated from the effect of theme, and further research needs to compare videos on the same theme with different visibility, as well as long sermons on the same theme. Figure 1 summarises the two arrangements.



Source: Constructed by the researchers based on the research findings

Figure 1. Two Arrangements of the Tri Linguistic Program and Their Relation to Visibility in the Corpus

In Figure 1, the first arrangement marks the three high-visibility videos. The engagement and transcendental dimensions are present while the normative reasoning dimension is absent, and legitimacy appears to rest on shared experience and the figure of the speaker. The second arrangement marks the two comparison videos. The normative reasoning dimension is present, the engagement dimension is absent apart from framing, the transcendental dimension is weak, and legitimacy rests on rules. Visibility is read as an indicator of counted attention. The dashed

lines mark an associative relation whose direction cannot be established by this cross-sectional design. A form that has already been widely watched may be chosen again in subsequent uploads, but it may equally have been chosen from the outset because its theme and style more readily attract attention. What can be stated is the existence of the relation, not its direction.

Adjustment of Form in the Opening Unit

The distribution of categories by message unit shows a regular division of function within a single video. The results of cross-tabulating categories with message units across the whole corpus are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Cross-Matrix of Marker Categories and Message Units in the Corpus

Marker category	Opening	Key sentence	Call to action
Pacing	3	0	0
Experiential anchoring	3	1	0
Framing	0	3	0
Frame shifting	0	3	0
Directing	1	0	3
Normative exhortation	0	0	2
Total	7	7	5

Source: Results of coding the five corpus videos with nineteen codes, processed by the researchers. The matrix contains NLP markers and normative exhortation; SLP and MLP markers are examined interpretively and are not counted

Table 2 shows that all pacing codes are in the opening, all frame-shifting codes are in the key sentence, and three of the four directing codes are in the call to action. Not one category is spread evenly across all units. One exception deserves note, namely the fourth directing code, which sits in the opening and comes from the on-screen text, not from the spoken utterance. This exception does not undermine the pattern but marks a path that is visible only when the visual channel is taken into account. This division of function can be examined on the surface of the text without requiring conjecture about the speaker's inner state.

Differences between groups are also visible in features that can be measured directly without coding. Six features separate the two groups with no case crossing over (three versus two), namely the second at which the first complete proposition

ends, reference to the audience's condition in the opening, opening on-screen text in the form of a statement of condition, all capital letters, emoticons, and technical religious terms in the key sentence. Two other features do not separate the groups. The number of spoken words in the opening ranges from fifteen to twenty in both groups, with VR-01 in fact containing the most words. The share of the opening in the total duration ranges from 16.4 to 22.4 percent, in a direction opposite to expectation. The figures for all eight features are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Form Features Measured Directly in the Five Videos

Feature	Separates?	High visibility (VT-01 to VT-03)	Comparison (VR-01, VR-04)
Second at which the first complete proposition ends	Yes	8 to 9 seconds	10 to 12 seconds
Reference to the audience's condition in the opening	Yes	VT-01: 9 seconds; VT-02: 8 seconds; VT-03: 9 seconds	VR-01: 12 seconds; VR-04: 10 seconds
Opening on-screen text as a statement of condition	Yes	Yes (VT-01, VT-02, VT-03)	No (VR-01, VR-04)
All capital letters	Yes	Yes (VT-01, VT-02, VT-03)	No (VR-01, VR-04)
Emoticons	Yes	Yes (VT-01, VT-02, VT-03)	No (VR-01, VR-04)
Technical religious terms in the key sentence	Yes	Yes (VT-01, VT-02, VT-03)	No (VR-01, VR-04)
Number of spoken words in the opening	No	15 to 20	15 to 20 (VR-01 highest)
Share of the opening in total duration (percent)	No	16.4 to 22.4 (range across the whole corpus)	16.4 to 22.4 (range across the whole corpus)

Source: Direct measurement of the transcripts and videos, processed by the researchers. The separation is descriptive and exploratory

What distinguishes the groups is therefore not the relative length of the opening but when the first proposition is closed in absolute seconds, namely eight to nine seconds in the high-visibility group versus ten to twelve seconds in the comparison group. This separation is descriptive and exploratory. With a comparison of three videos against two, perfect separation on a single feature can occur by chance, and the six features are not independent of one another because

most of them sit in the same unit. Two features also overlap with other categories, namely reference to the audience's condition with pacing and technical religious terms with content, so the evidence for purely formal features is narrower than six. Until the time at which the features were specified is confirmed, these features are treated as post hoc findings that are not intended as a statistical test.

A difference of one to four seconds between the two ranges is small by the standard of ordinary conversation, but it can matter in a format that requires viewers to decide whether to stay or move on in the first seconds. Five of the six distinguishing features operate in the opening unit, so the adjustment observed appears concentrated at a single point. This concentration is consistent with the production practices of short video that centre on the first second (Kaye et al., 2022) and with the observation that the digitalisation of da'wah is accompanied by adaptation to local culture (Muary et al., 2024). The adjustment on this channel appears in a subtle form, namely in the speed of closing the proposition and in visual prominence from the first second.

Religious Authority and Audience Attachment

In this corpus, the authority formed through the high-visibility arrangement appears to rest on shared experience and the figure of the speaker, not on textual authority. Studies of Islamic sermons and preaching show that the position of the speaker and the way listeners listen are themselves part of the rhetorical work (Gaffney, 1994; Hirschkind, 2006; Millie, 2017). The findings here are consistent with this while also showing the limits of the framework. Ethos was excluded from the Tri Linguistic Program even though the strongest finding concerns the authority of the speaker, so ethos needs to be included as a dimension of its own in the next development of the framework.

In the high-visibility videos, propositions are tied to everyday experience that the audience recognises, whereas ties to text are absent. Without a comparison with long sermons, it cannot be said that tying to text is replaced by experience; what can be stated is only that in this format the basis regarded as sufficient is experience the audience recognises. This finding is consistent with Bunt (2009), who notes that digital visibility can replace institutional recognition as a source of influence, and with Zaid et al. (2022), who show that storytelling skills and closeness to the audience underpin religious authority on social media. It also resembles Ardiansyah et al. (2025), who find that non-traditional preachers in Indonesia build influence through emotional storytelling and audience validation, and Tasruddin, Jusuf, and Cahyati (2026), who distinguish emotion-based, knowledge-based, and community-based models among Indonesian da'wah communities. The two arrangements found here may tentatively be compared with the emotion-based and knowledge-based models, although a corpus of five

videos cannot test that correspondence. The speaker's position as founder of the pesantren remains a background guarantee, but that guarantee is not re-presented within the text.

Statements from the four informants show that visibility does not by itself continue into meaning-making. The marker used is a linguistic trace, that is, the return of linguistic units from the video into the audience's speech when they retell its content. The clip whose key sentence contains experiential anchoring, namely VT-02, produced a retelling that included that anchoring in full for P-01. By contrast, VR-04, which contains no anchoring, produced no retelling from any participant, not even from P-02, who judged it more credible. Three bases for judging credibility appear in the data, namely the figure of the presenter for P-03, the adequacy of the explanation for P-02, and fit with one's own experience for P-01. Not one rests on textual authority.

These informant data are thin and must be read as illustrative. The claim that a clip with anchoring produces a full retelling rests on one participant (P-01) and one clip and cannot be generalised.

The gap between visibility and meaning-making appears in two forms that call for different handling. The first is lopsided absorption, that is, when feeling is absorbed without its proposition, as seen in P-04, who retained only a surface impression of the opening unit. The second is interrupted absorption, that is, when the sequence stops before it can proceed. P-04's intention to carry out the call lapsed not because of a change in attitude and not because of a sense of inability, but because the opportunity to act on it was erased by the next video, which arrived without a pause. Both forms were observed in a single informant, so they are suggestive.

The three bases for judging credibility can be read as three forms of authority negotiation taking place simultaneously on a single channel. P-03 relies on authority as role, P-02 on the adequacy of the argument, and P-01 on fit with their own experience. The landscape of authority that has been described as fragmented at the conceptual level thus also appears in the speech of individual audience members. Ståhl, Sormunen, and Mäkinen (2021) note a similar tendency in another form, namely a shift of part of epistemic trust to systems that supply information. In this corpus the shift does not reach the system but stops at the speaker and at the viewer's own experience.

One contrary observation needs to be noted so that this finding is not over-read. All calls to action in the corpus point outside the platform and request concrete acts of worship, such as increasing istighfar, performing ablution, or resolving to speak honestly. Not one call asks viewers to like, share, or subscribe, even though such calls are the ones that most directly raise metrics. Their absence indicates that adjustment in this corpus stops at the arrangement of form and does

not extend to requests for action that benefit the system.

Symbolic Commodification as an Interpretive Frame

Mosco (2009) distinguishes three paths of commodification in communication, namely commodification of content, of audiences, and of labour. The first two can be read tentatively in this corpus, whereas the third is only partly legible because the study did not reach the channel's production space. The entry point of this reading is the language choices visible on the surface of the text, not the structure of the platform or market behaviour. Besides these three paths, this article reads the commodification of the preacher's figure as a derived category that overlaps with the content and audience paths, because earlier studies position the personification of the preacher as a commodification technique. The study contains no data on monetisation, advertising, donations, or links between the channel and the pesantren's business units. All the readings that follow are therefore tentative, and only the commodification of content and audiences has a direct data basis.

Visibility as symbolic exchange value demands a tighter argument than is available here. The reading bridges three things at once, namely exchange value according to Mosco (2009), symbolic value arising from attention according to Couldry (2012), and the daily view rate as a measure. High views do not automatically become exchange value, because exchange value requires a party that converts attention into something else, such as advertising revenue, donations, or increased influence, and this was not examined. The informant findings in fact show that viewers can encounter a message without accepting it, so counted attention is not the same as meaning-making. Visibility is therefore treated here as an indicator of counted attention that opens the possibility of symbolic value, not as proof of exchange value.

Commodification of content is read through three tentative symptoms. First, compressing the message into 42 to 59 seconds demands one proposition per video, so that explanation requiring stages of reasoning gets no room. This compression is first of all a consequence of the format's limits and does not yet indicate a decision by the managers. Second, no explicit normative basis is mentioned in any key sentence, although VR-04 shows that normative reasoning can be accommodated in the same duration. Third, the six distinguishing features are mostly features of form, five of them in the opening unit. Uniformity of features across three videos with similar themes could suggest standardisation of form, but because theme also plays a part and the specification of features may be post hoc, this reading is tentative. Symptoms of this kind are read by Ramdani, Harianto, and Saefulloh (2025) as the entry of culture industry logic into the production of Islamic content.

Commodification of audiences, if it occurs, takes place when viewers' attention is turned into a unit of count. The daily view rate that this study uses as a classification tool is close to the measure of success commonly used on short-video platforms, but whether the channel managers use it in this way cannot be established because the study did not reach the production side. The range of 89 to 41,832 views per day shows a wide spread; whether the managers treat that spread as a measure of value cannot be known from these data. Because the view rate is used by the researchers themselves as a classification tool, the reading of audience commodification here is a hypothesis awaiting production data, not a finding. The gap between counted attention and uncounted meaning-making can be read as the place where symbolic commodification works (Mosco, 2009), but this reading is interpretive.

Commodification of the figure is visible in the speaker's position as a marker that merges with the message. The channel is named after the nickname of the founder of the pesantren, and one of the bases of credibility judgement that emerged in the data is the presenting figure himself. Einstein (2008) places the management of such identity at the core of religious branding, Mufadil, Mujib, and Rustandi (2022) found the personification of the preacher to be one commodification technique on da'wah channels, and Hoesterey (2015) has examined the formation of Aa Gym as a self-help religious figure packaged as a brand. This finding is therefore read as a continuation at the level of language, not as a new phenomenon. On the Aagym Official channel, the absence of a normative basis within the text seems to enlarge the role of that figure, but this cannot be established without a comparison with long sermons.

The third path in Mosco's framework, namely commodification of labour, cannot be traced directly because this study stops at the text and its reception. What follows is only a hypothesis for further research. The similarity on six features at once, including capital letters and emoticons in the opening on-screen text, could suggest a recurring editorial division of labour rather than merely the speaking style of an individual. If this hypothesis is borne out, the work of composing religious messages has shifted into content-production work subject to technical standards, a condition that Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy (2021) call the requirement of platform readiness. Testing it requires access to the channel's production space and lies beyond the reach of this study. A summary of the forms of commodification and the status of their evidence is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Interpretation of Symbolic Commodification and the Status of Its Evidence

Form of commodification	Symptoms in the corpus	Status of evidence
Content commodification	One proposition per video; normative basis not stated in the key sentence; uniform form features in the opening	Direct data basis, tentative
Audience commodification	View rate as the researchers' classification tool; gap between visibility and informants' linguistic traces	Hypothesis; awaiting production data
Preacher-figure commodification	Channel name merges with the figure's nickname; credibility judged through the presenting figure	Direct data basis, tentative
Labour commodification	Uniformity of form features may suggest an editorial division of labour	Hypothesis; beyond the reach of the data

Source: Results of the analysis of research data, processed by the researchers

The relation between language choice and visibility can run in both directions. Language choice can raise visibility, and counted visibility can encourage repetition of the same language choices in subsequent uploads. A loop of this kind could explain why the same opening pattern is repeated in all three high-visibility videos, but this study has no production data with which to test it, and similarity of theme may also be an alternative explanation.

A comparison with earlier studies clarifies where this study's contribution lies. Earlier studies show that commodification and packaging occur in digital da'wah and read them from content packaging and preacher image management (Hoesterey, 2015; Mufadil et al., 2022; Nawaf, 2025) or from culture industry logic at the structural level (Ramdani et al., 2025). Others add that da'wah on YouTube is shaped by algorithms and market demands (Nisa, 2024) and that content, audiences, and preachers become forms of market-driven spiritual labour (Mukhroman et al., 2026). This study adds one lower level, namely the linguistic unit within a particular message unit. Three form features appear to differ between the high-visibility group and its comparison in this corpus, namely a first proposition closed one to four seconds earlier, an opening that departs from a condition the audience recognises rather than an announcement of the topic, and a key sentence without a normative basis. None of the three is visible if analysis stops at the level of packaging, with the caveat that differences in theme also play a part and that the features may have been specified post hoc.

These findings need to be read with the right measure. There is no transactional call in the corpus, and all calls to action point to worship outside the platform. The commodification read here is therefore symbolic, not directly commercial, and is not an assessment of the intentions of the speaker or the

managers. Kitiarsa (2008) explains that religious symbols can circulate in the cultural market without losing their religious appearance, and that is the condition seen here. The message still contains an invitation to worship, while its form has been adjusted to the requirements of circulation. What has changed is not the purpose of da'wah but the arrangement of language used to achieve it. P-02's retelling, the only one available, shows a proposition that originally took the form of a sign turned into a definite cause, and the objection P-02 then raised was directed at the formulation that resulted from that shift. One case is not enough to conclude that there is a risk of meaning shift, but it is consistent with Hjarvard's (2013) observation that mediatization changes the conditions that must be met for religious meaning to reach audiences, and with concerns that message distortion and weak content credibility accompany da'wah on social media (Baharudin & Waehama, 2024).

CONCLUSION

In the five videos of the Aagym Official channel, linguistic markers are arranged in two arrangements that do not occur together. The first arrangement, which marks all the high-visibility videos, contains pacing and experiential anchoring in the opening, transcendental renaming of inner states in the key sentence, and a closing of specific directing marked by immediacy. The second arrangement, which marks the comparison group, places normative reasoning in the key sentence and normative exhortation in the closing, without pacing. The transcendental dimension is present in all five videos with differing prominence. Not one of the five key sentences states an explicit normative basis. The difference between the two arrangements is chiefly a difference in the presence of dimensions and cannot be separated from differences in theme.

In this corpus, authority in the high-visibility videos appears to rest on shared experience and the figure of the speaker, not on textual authority. The audience attachment read from the four informants is uneven. The clip containing experiential anchoring produced a full retelling for one informant, whereas the clip without anchoring produced no retelling, even from the informant who judged it more credible. The informant findings are illustrative and need testing on more data.

Symbolic commodification in this article is an interpretive frame for the adjustment of message form, not a finding about economic practice and not an assessment of the intentions of the speaker or channel managers. The interpretation of content commodification rests on the compression of one proposition per video, the absence of an explicit normative basis in the key sentence, and the exploratory uniformity of form features. Audience and labour commodification can be advanced only as hypotheses because production data

are unavailable. The absence of calls to like, share, or subscribe throughout the corpus holds this reading back from further conclusions. The Tri Linguistic Program itself is a preliminary proposal that has been tested on only five videos.

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