



## Gender Equality in Islam: Adi Hidayat's YouTube Discourse

Yuliani,<sup>1\*</sup> Darajat Wibawa,<sup>2</sup> Moch Fakhruroji<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

\* Corresponding Author, Email: yuliani@uinsgd.ac.id

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the representation of women in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's (UAH) sermons on YouTube, to analyze how such discourse is produced and reproduced within the socio-cultural context of Indonesia, and to identify its ideological implications for the understanding of gender equality in Islam. Employing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the research explores three major themes: education and gender identity, women's socio-economic roles, and historical figures as role models. The data were collected from UAH's YouTube sermons, including both full-length lectures and viral short clips. The findings reveal that women's representation is ambivalent: women are glorified, yet such glorification is bounded by normative constraints that tie them to domestic and spiritual roles. The discourse is produced within Indonesia's patriarchal culture and reproduced through the algorithmic logic of social media that amplifies normative messages. Its ideological implication is the reinforcement of a new form of patriarchy termed affirmative patriarchy, a mechanism of control that works not through rejection, but through conditional recognition and symbolic praise. The main challenge of this research lies in its limited scope, focusing solely on UAH's sermons, and in its methodological constraint of not examining audience reception. Practically, this study recommends promoting digital religious literacy and developing more egalitarian preaching strategies. This research proposes the concept of affirmative patriarchy, which extends the study of gender discourse in digital Islam and enriches critical discourse analysis within the field of religion and gender studies.

**Keywords:** affirmative patriarchy; critical discourse analysis; digital preaching; gender; Islam.

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### 1. Introduction

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has led to a significant transformation in the practice of communication and the production of religious knowledge. Social media, particularly platforms like YouTube, has become not only a space for entertainment but also an arena for preaching and shaping public opinion. This phenomenon emphasizes that religion is no longer solely conveyed through conventional pulpits, but is instead produced, consumed, and distributed in a highly fluid and interactive virtual space (Tsuria & Campbell, 2021). In Indonesia, known as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, digital preaching is growing rapidly and introducing new actors who have a significant influence on how the community understands religious values (Nurlatifah et al., 2022). One such actor is Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH), a popular cleric who uses YouTube as the primary medium for delivering his sermons.

In an Indonesian social context still marked by tensions between patriarchal traditions and demands for gender equality, the presence of digital da'wah plays a dual role (Masrurroh et al., 2025). On the one hand, it provides a means of religious education easily accessible to millions; on the other, it also shapes representations of gender identity laden with ideological content. Discourses on women, domestic roles, public space, and even contemporary issues such as feminism and transgenderism are frequent themes in digital sermons (Hines, 2019). With an audience largely drawn from young people and the urban middle class, the discourses constructed within digital da'wah spaces have a powerful

social reproductive power, even surpassing those of traditional religious study forums.

The issue of gender equality in Islam is not a new one. Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have long debated the position of women in sacred texts, Islamic law, and social practices. Islamic feminism, for example, emerged as an effort to reinterpret religious texts to create more equal space for women's agency (Zubair & Zubair, 2017). Meanwhile, other scholars emphasize the importance of rereading the history of women in Islam to identify their leadership potential and contributions in the public sphere (Mernissi, 1991b). In the Indonesian context, studies on women and Islam have focused heavily on the movements of Muslim women's organizations, educational policies, and socio-political dynamics related to women's roles (Rofiq, 2024). However, little research has examined how gender issues are constructed through digital da'wah practices, particularly by charismatic figures with millions of followers on social media.

Previous research on digital da'wah in Indonesia has largely focused on the mediatization of religion, namely how religion undergoes transformation when it enters the digital space (Helland, 2016). Several other studies have examined the role of YouTube and social media as arenas for the dissemination of popular Islamic discourse packaged in a millennial style (Zaid et al., 2022). Others have highlighted the role of celebrity preachers in shaping young people's religious identities (Rustan et al., 2020). However, studies specifically examining gender construction in digital da'wah, particularly using a critical discourse analysis approach, are still relatively limited. This issue is crucial, given that gender representation in digital da'wah goes beyond conveying religious teachings to shaping societal thinking about the relationship between men and women.

Studies of gender discourse in Islam on social media require consideration of two important dimensions. First, the textual dimension, namely how religious narratives are structured, the choice of diction used, and the metaphors or analogies used to describe women. Second, the socio-cultural dimension of practice, namely how these narratives operate within the context of a society still steeped in patriarchal values, while simultaneously facing the challenges of modernity and globalization. In other words, analysis cannot stop at the linguistic level but must also consider the context of discourse production, distribution, and consumption (Fairclough, 1995).

In this context, Ustadz Adi Hidayat's sermons become an interesting object for research. As a public figure widely known for his intellectual capacity and strong rhetorical style, UAH holds high symbolic authority in shaping public understanding. His sermons on women, whether emphasizing women's privileges, discussing their role in the workplace, or highlighting the exemplary role of historical figures like Khadijah, present a rich representation for analysis. On the one hand, UAH often presents affirmative narratives that motivate women to be grateful and proud of their identity. However, on the other hand, he also emphasizes the limitations of women's roles within a conservative normative framework. This ambivalence creates an interesting discursive space: does digital preaching reinforce patriarchy, or does it open up opportunities for a reinterpretation of women's roles?

Compared to previous studies, this research has several important differences. First, this study not only describes the content of UAH's sermons but also analyzes them using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Thus, this study examines how discourses about women emerge not only at the textual level but also within specific socio-cultural contexts steeped in ideology. Second, this research focuses on gender issues, a theme relatively rarely addressed seriously in digital da'wah studies. Most previous studies have emphasized popular aspects, communication strategies, or mediatization, while critical analysis of gender representation remains limited.

Furthermore, this research offers a theoretical contribution by combining critical discourse analysis with an Islamic feminist perspective. This approach allows for a dual reading: on the one hand, it critiques how patriarchy is reproduced through digital da'wah (Islamic outreach), and on the other, it opens up space for alternative interpretations rooted in Islamic tradition itself. In this way, this research seeks to bridge the tension between secular feminist critiques, often considered alien, and the Islamic discourse rooted in Muslim societies.

Based on the above explanation, the objectives of this study are to: (1) describe the representation of women in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's lectures on YouTube, (2) analyze how the discourse is produced and

reproduced in the Indonesian socio-cultural context, and (3) identify the ideological implications of the discourse on the understanding of gender equality in Islam. This study aims to provide practical contributions for da'wah activists, educators, and the broader community to become more critical consumers of religious discourse on social media.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the representation of gender equality in digital da'wah, utilizing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework. Furthermore, this research integrates an Islamic feminist perspective to examine the ambivalence of UAH discourse between spiritual affirmation and patriarchal reproduction. Thus, this research not only contributes to the literature on digital da'wah but also expands the scope of gender studies in Islam, particularly in the contemporary Indonesian context. Furthermore, this research demonstrates that digital da'wah functions not only as a means of disseminating religious teachings but also as an arena for the politics of meaning, where Muslim women's identities are produced, negotiated, and contested.

## 2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework (Fairclough, 2023). This design was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives, namely to uncover how gender discourse is constructed in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's (UAH) YouTube lectures, as well as how this discourse is produced, disseminated, and operated within a socio-cultural context. Fairclough emphasizes three complementary levels of analysis—text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice—to understand the relationship between language and power.

The research location focuses on the Adi Hidayat Official YouTube channel, a digital da'wah medium with a very broad audience reach in Indonesia. Data selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely based on the relevance of the theme to gender issues. Of the hundreds of available videos, this study analyzed five main videos: Proud to be a Woman, Are Women Allowed to Work?, and Khadijah Binti Khuwailid: The Greatest Woman in the Universe. Muslimah Studies: Types of Women in the Qur'an were also reviewed because they were relevant to contemporary gender issues. Data were collected through digital observation, verbatim transcription of lectures, and thematic coding to identify issues of education, socioeconomics, historical role models, and socio-political participation. This process was supplemented with secondary data, such as news articles, academic literature, and public conversations on social media, to broaden our understanding of the context of discourse production and consumption.

The analysis was conducted in stages, following Fairclough's three-level framework. At the textual level, the focus was directed at the diction, rhetorical style, and narrative used by UAH to describe women, such as terms such as "fitrah," "blessing," or "natural." At the level of discursive practice, the analysis highlighted how the lectures were produced, packaged, and disseminated through YouTube, including how certain audiences—particularly young women and urban Muslim women—were primarily targeted. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural level of practice was used to connect the lecture narratives to Indonesia's still patriarchal social context, while also being within the currents of global and Islamic feminist discourse. To maintain validity, this study employed several strategies. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by combining Islamic feminist perspectives (Wadud, 2009), representation theory (Hall, 1997b), and the concept of spiritual agency (T. Mahmood et al., 2005). Source triangulation combined lecture videos with academic literature and public interactions on social media. Furthermore, the researcher employed reflexivity to minimize subjective bias in interpreting religious texts. All data collection and analysis processes were documented in an audit trail for further review by other researchers.

Using this methodology, the research seeks to produce an in-depth, valid, and contextual analysis of gender discourse in UAH's digital preaching. The AWK approach enables the exposure of the ambivalence in sermons that, on the one hand, present affirmative narratives for women, while on the other, still reproduce patriarchal normative constraints.

### 3. Research Results

#### 3.1. Education & Gender Identity

Ustadz Adi Hidayat's (UAH) sermon, "Proud to Be a Woman, Women Are Special!" , is one of the most compelling representations of the construction of gender discourse in digital preaching spaces. This sermon emphasizes the affirmative narrative that women are special, noble, and hold a high status in Islam. With his distinctive rhetorical style, UAH seeks to motivate women to take pride in their identity and not feel inferior to men. Phrases such as "women are a gift," "paradise lies under the feet of mothers," and "a righteous woman is better than the world and all it contains" are frequently repeated to emphasize the main message.

Figure 1 Proud to be a Woman



(Source: Youtube Adi Hidayat Official, 2025)

At the textual level, UAH's chosen diction is rife with positive connotations, full of appreciation, and spiritual nuances. UAH cites Quranic verses emphasizing respect for mothers, as well as hadiths depicting women as centers of love and blessings. This rhetorical strategy clearly creates an affirmative atmosphere that fosters self-confidence in female audiences. This narrative can be understood as a form of positive representation that symbolically positions women as crucial subjects in the construction of the Muslim family and society (Kirmani, 2009).

However, upon closer examination through the lens of critical discourse analysis, this affirmative narrative is not entirely free from limiting normative frameworks (Herzog, 2016). Although women are often portrayed as noble, this nobility is frequently associated with their traditional roles, particularly as mothers and wives. Women's privilege, in this sermon, is more associated with their reproductive and domestic functions, rather than their potential as autonomous individuals in the public sphere. In other words, the respect for women offered by UAH is conditional, granted to the extent that women fulfill their roles in accordance with the normative construction of Islam, understood patriarchally (Duderija, 2016).

This ambivalence can be analyzed through Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which states that meaning is never neutral but is always produced within power relations (Hall, 1997d). The UAH presents women as privileged subjects, but within a predetermined framework: the ideal woman is obedient, submissive, supportive of her husband, and fulfilling her role within the family. Thus, this seemingly positive representation also functions as a mechanism of social control, implicitly limiting women's agency outside the domestic sphere (Hutter & Williams, 2024).

At the level of discourse practice, it is important to examine how this lecture was produced and consumed. The lecture "Proud to Be a Woman" was uploaded to the official UAH YouTube channel, which has millions of followers, primarily targeting Muslim women. The video was promoted as a "Muslimah study" format, so the audience, both in attendance and viewing, was predominantly female. In the comments section, many viewers expressed gratitude and were moved by the lecture's "upliftment." This positive reaction demonstrates that UAH's affirmative narrative successfully

addresses the psychological needs of urban Muslim women, who are often oppressed by social standards (Rahman et al., 2024).

However, it's important to emphasize that this acceptance also demonstrates how the audience becomes part of the process of reproducing patriarchal discourse. As Althusser explains about ideological apparatuses, religion can function as a mechanism for internalizing certain values into individual consciousness (Althusser, 2024). By affirming the sermon, the audience is essentially agreeing with the normative framework offered, albeit in the form of a self-aggrandizing motivation. This demonstrates how digital da'wah acts as an ideological channel that operates through persuasion, not coercion (Raya, 2025).

At the socio-cultural level, the UAH narrative must be placed within the context of Indonesian society, which remains patriarchal but also grappling with the discourse of gender equality (Heriyanto, 2023). On the one hand, Indonesian women already have broad access to education and employment; on the other, they are still burdened by traditional expectations as housewives. The UAH sermon then functions as a "mediator," offering religious legitimacy for women to remain proud of their identity, even though their freedom of movement is often restricted (Meler & Benjamin, 2022). In other words, the UAH's affirmative narrative resonates with Muslim women's need for recognition while simultaneously reinforcing existing patriarchal norms.

This discussion is also relevant to Saba Mahmood's notion of spiritual agency. Mahmood critiques liberal feminist views that tend to assess agency solely in terms of resistance to patriarchal structures. She argues that women in traditional Islamic communities can demonstrate agency through obedience, piety, and adherence to religious norms (S. Mahmood, 2006). Within this framework, the female audience members who were moved and motivated by the UAH lecture can be understood as exhibiting spiritual agency: they chose to accept and internalize religious values as part of their self-identity (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013). However, it is important to note that this agency is ambivalent, as it strengthens women's spiritual positions while limiting their ability to negotiate broader social roles.

When compared to the perspective of Islamic feminism, as proposed by Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, the UAH narrative appears more conservative. Wadud and Barlas advocate a reinterpretation of religious texts to recognize women equally in all aspects of life, not just in domestic roles (Kassam, 2013). Meanwhile, UAH continues to emphasize the natural differences between men and women, emphasizing that women's dignity lies in their roles as mothers and companions to their husbands. This difference demonstrates the tension between progressive interpretations of Islamic feminism and popular digital preaching, which tends to uphold traditional norms (Rehman, 2020).

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that UAH's sermons have a strong appeal, primarily because they present gender discourse in a format easily accessible to the wider community. Rather than using feminist jargon unfamiliar to some Muslims, UAH frames affirmative messages in familiar religious language. This aligns with Rocha's findings that popular digital da'wah is often successful because it adapts its message to the psychological needs of its audience without directly clashing with conservative norms (Rocha, 2021). In other words, UAH's sermons create a space of compromise where women can feel honored while remaining within a patriarchal framework.

Thus, the analysis of the theme of education and gender identity reveals that the UAH lecture presents an ambivalent discourse. On the one hand, it provides affirmation and motivation for Muslim women to be proud of their identity. On the other hand, this affirmation is inseparable from a normative framework that limits women's agency to the domestic sphere. This affirmative narrative thus serves a dual function: strengthening women's self-confidence while simultaneously reproducing established patriarchal structures (Yousafzai et al., 2024).

The implications of these findings are significant. For academics, this analysis demonstrates that digital da'wah cannot be viewed solely as a medium for religious dissemination, but also as an arena for the production of gender ideology. For the wider public, especially Muslim women, it is important to recognize that the respect offered in religious sermons is often conditional and normative (Ginting-Carlström & Chliova, 2023). Such critical awareness can open up space for more inclusive alternative

interpretations, without necessarily negating the religious values that underpin Muslim identity. The results of the analysis can be seen in the following table:

Table 1  
AWK Analysis of Education & Gender Identity Themes

Level Fairclough	Evidence/Citation	Linguistic & Discursive Analysis	Ideological Function & Social Impact
<b>Text – Affirmative &amp; religious diction</b>	Sayings: “Women are a gift”, “Heaven is under the feet of mothers”	Positive diction builds a noble image. Quotations of verses and hadiths are used to affirm authority.	Affirming women, but tying their nobility to domestic/spiritual roles.
<b>Text – Historical examples</b>	The figure of Khadijah is described as the “leader of the women of heaven”	Exemplarization: historical figures are positioned as ideal models.	Forming the standard of ideal femininity → contemporary women are measured from exemplary figures.
<b>Text – Semantic boundaries of work vs. livelihood</b>	“Women can work, but maintenance is still the responsibility of men.”	Conditional language (“can, but...”) limits the meaning of economic freedom.	Perpetuating male hegemony as the primary breadwinner.
<b>Discourse practices – Production &amp; distribution</b>	The video was uploaded as Muslimah Study, and re-shared as a short clip.	Production & virality strategies simplify the message into a moral slogan.	Expanding the reach of normative discourse through digital algorithms.
<b>Socio-cultural practices – Patriarchal context</b>	The phrase “fair doesn’t have to be equal” was widely quoted by the audience.	It is a form of religious coping for women in a patriarchal structure.	Justifying patriarchy as “divine decree.”
<b>Subjectivation / Interpellation</b>	Greetings: women are called guardians of harmony, moral role models	Affective language addresses the audience as a normative subject.	Women internalize norms, self-policing (self-monitoring) emerges.
<b>Rhetorical ambivalence</b>	“Women can be doctors, teachers... but don't leave your nature.”	Softening strategy → gives the illusion of flexibility with moral conditions.	Creating a social compromise: reducing protests but maintaining patriarchal norms.

The table above clearly demonstrates that the affirmative discourse constructed by UAH cannot be separated from a restrictive normative framework. At the textual level, the linguistic strategies employed combine positive affirmations with conditional constraints, thus honoring women while still directing them to adhere to traditional roles. At the level of discursive practice, the choice of format for Muslimah Studies and digital distribution strategies demonstrates how normative messages are reproduced and expanded through social media algorithms.

Furthermore, at the level of socio-cultural practice, UAH's sermons function as a form of religious legitimacy for the patriarchal structures still dominant in Indonesian society. Phrases like “fairness does not have to be equal” become a kind of mantra that offers psychological comfort to female audiences while normalizing structural inequality. The process of interpellation turns female audience members into normative subjects who “voluntarily” accept a feminine identity according to the construction of da'wah (Islamic preaching) (Esseissah, 2016).

Thus, AWK's analysis confirms the existence of discursive ambivalence: UAH successfully provides symbolic recognition that fosters pride in women, but this recognition is conditional and normative, thus reinforcing patriarchal structures. This ambivalence explains why UAH's lectures are popular and widely accepted, as they offer emotional affirmation while maintaining the stability of social norms (Undurraga et al., 2025).

### 3.2. Socio-Economic Role of Women

Ustadz Adi Hidayat's (UAH) sermon, "Is It Permissible for Women to Work?", is one of the most eloquent demonstrations of the ambivalence of gender discourse in digital preaching. This topic is relevant because the debate about women's work is a constant presence in contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly in Indonesia, which is still marked by tensions between patriarchal norms and socio-economic realities (Daharis, 2023). On the one hand, the number of women entering the workforce continues to increase; on the other, traditional expectations continue to place women as the primary household managers. In his sermon, UAH attempted to navigate this tension with a distinctive approach: he opened an affirmative space by stating that women are permitted to work, but then locked that space with normative limitations in the form of nature, livelihood, and domestic priorities.

Figure 2 Can Women Work?



(Source: Youtube Adi Hidayat Official, 2025)

At the textual level, this lecture is replete with sentence structures that emphasize a permissive-restrictive pattern (Rausis, 2023). UAH begins by granting permission: "women are allowed to work," but quickly adds a condition: "Maintenance remains the man's responsibility, and it must not interfere with the household." The word "allowed" creates a sense of flexibility, but is followed by the absolute "still," thus closing off the possibility of negotiation. This kind of rhetoric functions not only as a moral reminder but also as a control mechanism. Linguistically, the phrase "allowed... but" functions as a symbolic fence that gives the illusion of freedom, but with very limited room for movement.

Even more pointedly, UAH uses the term "nature" as the foundation of her argument. By stating that "earning a living is a man's nature, while a woman's primary job is to care for the family," she positions the division of gender roles as if it were a natural law or divine decree. The use of the term "nature" here is significant because it shifts socio-economic issues into the realm of the natural and sacred, making them difficult to challenge (Dhan Gahalot & Gupta, 2025). In other words, if women demand equal roles in earning a living, their demands will be considered contrary to nature and, therefore, considered unnatural or even sinful. This kind of naturalization strategy is common in patriarchal discourse: it makes power relations appear natural and undeniable (Peng et al., 2024).

Beyond semantic opposition and natural rhetoric, this sermon also contains a strong moral framing. UAH states, "If a wife works but neglects her children, it is not a blessing, but a calamity." This sentence directly links women's economic activity to moral and spiritual consequences. With this framing, women's work is not merely a pragmatic matter but is also assessed in terms of sin and reward (Bermúdez, 2022). This narrative inevitably burdens women with guilt: working is permissible, but if the consequence is neglecting children, then the work is not a good thing but a calamity. This moral framing reinforces



ideological control, as it shifts economic issues into the realm of religious ethics, fraught with fear and obligation (D'Cruz et al., 2022).

At the level of discourse practice, these lectures are produced in the format of "Muslimah Studies," a forum specifically aimed at women. This audience selection is crucial because normative messages are delivered directly to the target audience (Nan et al., 2022). Furthermore, these lectures are cut into short clips that circulate on social media with more pointed titles, such as "Career Women Be Careful!" or "Housewives Are More Noble." These video clips often omit the affirmative nuance of "working is allowed" and emphasize the restrictive aspects. Thus, what is widely circulated is not full ambivalence, but rather a more conservative message. This process of digital production and distribution reinforces patriarchal hegemony, as restrictive messages are more easily viral and resonate more with existing social norms (Greco & Leone, 2025).

When viewed through Fairclough's framework, the socio-cultural level of practice reveals a more complex tension. On the one hand, Indonesia's economic reality shows that many women work, not only for self-actualization but also because of the family's economic needs (Purnamasari et al., 2025). Demographic studies indicate that women's economic contributions are significant, especially among the urban middle class and poor families (Ali et al., 2022). However, the UAH lectures continue to emphasize that providing for a living is a man's responsibility, even though the reality often shows otherwise. This tension produces a dual ideological function: the UAH lectures serve as a religious coping mechanism for working women (Triana & Sudjatmiko, 2021). By hearing that "living for a living is still a man's obligation," women can feel less burdened, as if their work is not an obligation but merely an extra. In this context, the UAH lectures provide psychological comfort, even though they actually normalize structural injustice.

The ambivalence of this discourse becomes even clearer when viewed through the interpellation process. Female audience members are addressed with the identity of "mothers," which ties them directly to their domestic roles. This address is not merely a stylistic device, but also a discursive strategy to affirm women's normative identities as mothers and homemakers (Andelsman Alvarez, 2025). UAH even mentions professions such as doctors, teachers, or entrepreneurs, but always adds the condition "as long as they prioritize family." In this way, audiences are positioned as normative subjects who may be active in the public sphere but must still prioritize domestic roles. This kind of interpellation demonstrates how digital da'wah functions as an ideological apparatus: it calls individuals to accept certain roles as part of their religious identity (Ulyan, 2023).

Theoretically, this discourse can be compared to the idea of Islamic feminism. Figures such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas advocate a reinterpretation of Islamic texts to allow women an equal role in all fields, including the economy (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024). They argue that the Quranic text does not inherently restrict women, and that these restrictions arise from patriarchal interpretations (Mubarak, 2021). UAH's lecture clearly takes a different position: rather than opening up equal space, it continues to emphasize nature and limitations. Interestingly, however, UAH's lecture does not completely close off public space to women. Instead, it employs a compromise strategy: women are allowed to work, even in prestigious professions, but are always bound by moral requirements. In this way, UAH's lecture presents a version of Islam that appears moderate, yet remains patriarchal.

When read within Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this discourse operates through an encoding process (Hall, 1997c). UAH encodes the message that women's work is possible, but only within a specific framework. Audiences then decode it according to their social standing. Working urban women may receive this message as a moral reminder; while non-working women may use it to reinforce the legitimacy of their domestic choices (Ghasemi et al., 2025). Thus, the same message can be received in different ways, but remains within the patriarchal orbit.

Furthermore, this lecture also demonstrates how digital da'wah becomes an ideological apparatus, as understood by Althusser (Althusser, 2024). Using gentle rhetoric, UAH's lectures do not force women to comply, but rather encourage them to voluntarily accept normative roles. The affirmative message ("it's okay to work") serves as a gateway that makes the audience feel acknowledged, while the normative requirement ("put family first") ensures that patriarchal structures are maintained. This process explains why UAH's da'wah is so popular: it offers both symbolic recognition and social control.



This analysis confirms that the discourse on women's work in the UAH lecture is ambivalent. It presents a compromise between the demands of modernity (women being active in the public sphere) and patriarchal norms (husband's support, domestic priorities). This ambivalence is what makes the UAH lecture ideologically effective: it neither outright rejects modernity nor allows women complete freedom. Thus, the lecture successfully creates a "middle ground" that seemingly appeases all parties, while essentially reinforcing patriarchal structures (Chen, 2025).

The implications of these findings are important for both academic studies and social practice. For academics, this analysis demonstrates how digital da'wah shapes gender discourse not only by conveying religious texts but also by negotiating contemporary socio-economic realities. For the community, especially Muslim women, these sermons demonstrate that the affirmative recognition they receive is often conditional. Critical awareness of this ambivalence is crucial for women to not only feel honored but also to recognize the limitations they maintain (Lan, 2025).

Table 2 AWK Analysis of the Theme of Women's Socio-Economic Roles

Level Fairclough	Evidence/Citation	Linguistic & Discursive Analysis	Ideological Function & Social Impact
<b>Text – Semantic opposition</b>	"Women are allowed to work, but providing for a living remains the man's responsibility, and the condition is that it does not disrupt the household."	Permissive–restrictive structure: the sentence opens with permission, but closes with a condition. The word "may" softens, while "stay" locks in the male role.	Creating the illusion of freedom → actually limited space. Maintaining the status quo of men as breadwinners.
<b>Text – Rhetoric of nature</b>	Phrase: "Making a living is a man's nature, a woman's main job is to take care of the family."	The diction "kodrat" suggests natural/divine law → non-negotiable.	Naturalization of patriarchy: gender roles are presented as if they were biological & theological laws.
<b>Text – Moral framing</b>	"If a wife works but neglects her children, it is not a blessing, but a disaster."	Moralistic rhetoric → women's work is associated with sin or blessing.	Limiting women's work space through guilt & moral fear.
<b>Discourse practices – Production &amp; format</b>	A lecture delivered at a Muslimah study forum was cut into a short viral clip: "Career Women Be Careful!"	Selective editing emphasizes restrictive messages rather than affirmative nuances.	The message "it's okay" is drowned out, but what goes viral is "be careful" → strengthening public boundaries.
<b>Socio-cultural practices – Patriarchal economic context</b>	Many women in the audience work for economic reasons. The lecture emphasized "husband's livelihood," though the reality often differs.	The tension between economic reality (women working) and religious norms (husband's support).	Offering religious coping: women accept work as an extra, not a right; normalizing structural injustice.
<b>Subjectivation</b>	Greeting: "Mothers can work, but don't forget nature."	The audience is addressed as "mothers" → the primary identity remains domestic.	Althusser's interpellation: the audience accepts the domestic role as the core of identity.

<b>Rhetorical ambivalence</b>	“Please be a doctor, teacher, entrepreneur... as long as you prioritize your family.”	Providing broad professional space, but moral requirements become a fence.	Making compromises: women feel acknowledged, but still in control.
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The table above shows that the UAH discourse on women's work is constructed through mechanisms of ambivalence. At the textual level, permissive-restrictive sentence structures are key: women are given the space to work, but this permission is always locked with normative conditions (Koh & Lee, 2023). Dictionaries such as "nature" and "living" function as naturalization strategies, as if the division of gender roles were an unquestionable law of nature.

At the level of discourse practice, lectures are produced in formats specifically geared toward female audiences, then cut into short, viral videos. These videos often emphasize the restrictive side ("career women, be careful") rather than the affirmative side. In this way, the message "it's okay to work" becomes subordinate, while the message "don't violate your nature" becomes dominant in the digital space (Dey, 2024).

At the level of socio-cultural practice, this discourse operates within the Indonesian economic reality, where many women work to support their families. UAH's sermon serves as a comforting religious coping mechanism: it acknowledges women's need to work but emphasizes that providing for their family is the husband's responsibility. Thus, the sermon normalizes structural inequality in a seemingly gentle and religious manner (Gao et al., 2025).

This process also demonstrates how women are interpellated into normative subjects: they may be teachers, doctors, or entrepreneurs, but must still prioritize family (Rutherford et al., 2022). In other words, the public sphere is open, but tightly controlled by moral requirements (Dadpour & Shewly, 2025). This analysis confirms that UAH's lecture on women's work presents an ambivalent discourse. It successfully presents a da'wah that feels inclusive and motivating, yet at the same time continues to reproduce patriarchal structures. It is precisely this ambivalence that makes the discourse effective: it offers a compromise acceptable to urban Muslim women, feeling both acknowledged and directed to remain within a normative framework.

### 3.3. Historical Figures & Exemplary

One of the most effective rhetorical strategies in Islamic preaching is the use of role models (Cardó, 2021). In his sermon "Khadijah Binti Khuwailid: The Greatest Woman in the Universe," Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH), presented a narrative that positioned Khadijah as the ideal female figure in Islam. This sermon emphasized that Khadijah was not only the Prophet's wife, but also a woman of steadfast faith, courage, and significant contributions to Islamic preaching. By highlighting a historical figure, UAH attempted to present a concrete example for contemporary Muslim women. However, critical discourse analysis reveals that this representation is also fraught with ambivalence: Khadijah is portrayed as a great woman, but one who is great because of her piety, loyalty, and support for the Prophet, not because of her independent agency (Moh Soim et al., 2024).

Figure 5 Khadijah Binti Khuwailid



(Source: Youtube Adi Hidayat Official, 2025)

At the textual level, UAH's lecture contained highly hyperbolic diction in describing Khadijah. She was called "the greatest woman," "the leader of the women of Paradise," and even "a role model for all time." This rhetoric clearly constructed Khadijah's image as an unrivaled model of perfection. UAH outlined Khadijah's sacrifices in supporting the Prophet Muhammad, both morally and financially, and portrayed her as a key pillar in the founding of Islamic da'wah (Islamic propagation) (Malik, 2024). This narrative undoubtedly reinforced the pride of the female audience, as they saw that Islam had placed women in a noble position from the beginning.

However, upon closer examination, this narrative still places Khadijah within a framework of domestic and supportive relationships. Khadijah's greatness in this sermon stems not primarily from her role as a successful, independent businesswoman, but rather from her dedication of her life and wealth to the Prophet's apostolic vision (Dhala, 2024). Thus, Khadijah's economic contributions are presented not as evidence of female autonomy, but as a form of devotion to her husband (Sbaihat, 2022). Linguistically, this is evident in the choice of words that emphasize loyalty, sacrifice, and support, rather than leadership or independence.

The representation of Khadijah in the UAH lecture is not simply a reflection of historical fact, but rather a construction of meaning that serves to shape contemporary gender norms (Hall, 1997e). By emphasizing Khadijah's domestic and supportive side, the lecture conveys the implicit message that modern women should follow the same pattern: they may contribute, but their contributions must always be framed within the framework of loyalty to their husbands. In other words, Khadijah serves as a normative model that governs the behavior of contemporary Muslim women (Sakai, 2022).

At the level of discourse practice, this lecture is presented in a "historical study" format with an emotionally charged narrative style. UAH details Khadijah's loyalty, how she comforted the Prophet when he first received revelation, and how she willingly sacrificed her wealth for the sake of Islam (Akbar & Vebrynda, 2022). This narrative style creates emotional engagement among the audience, especially women, who feel both inspired and moved. In the video's comments section, many viewers wrote that they wanted to emulate Khadijah by being a devout, patient, and supportive wife to their husbands. These reactions demonstrate that the lecture not only shapes historical perceptions but also shapes contemporary women's identities (Petraroli & Baars, 2022).

The distribution of sermons on social media further reinforces their ideological function. Viral video clips often feature hyperbolic statements such as "Khadijah is the greatest woman in the universe" or "Khadijah is the leader of the women of Paradise." These clips, circulated out of context, tend to emphasize idealization without critical nuance. As a result, audiences increasingly internalize the image of Khadijah as the model of the perfect wife, ignoring the complexities of her historical reality as a successful businesswoman and independent woman (Abidi, 2023).

At the level of socio-cultural practice, the representation of Khadijah in the UAH sermon serves to legitimize persistent patriarchal norms in Indonesia. By positioning Khadijah as an ideal figure, contemporary women are encouraged to make loyalty and devotion central to their identities (Smith et al., 2023). This reinforces the social expectation that a good woman is obedient to her husband and supports her family, although she may also contribute financially (Bhojani et al., 2024). Within this framework, the UAH sermon serves a dual function: it provides symbolic recognition that women can play a significant role, but only to the extent that that role supports men.

This discourse can be compared with the perspective of Islamic feminism. Fatima Mernissi, for example, in her study of women in Islamic history, emphasizes the importance of rereading female figures as possessing agency and power, not simply as loyal and supportive (Mernissi, 1991a). From this perspective, Khadijah can be seen as a successful, independent businesswoman, not simply a supportive wife of the Prophet. However, UAH's sermon does not emphasize this aspect of independence, but rather prioritizes the narrative of loyalty. This difference suggests that popular da'wah tends to choose representations that conform to patriarchal norms, while Islamic feminism seeks to open up space for alternative, more egalitarian interpretations (Wadud, 2021).

In addition to Mernissi, Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas emphasize the importance of viewing Islamic texts as open spaces for gender equality (Moussa, 2021). In their framework, the figure of Khadijah

can be interpreted as evidence that women are capable of being full subjects in Islamic history. However, the UAH sermon emphasizes Khadijah's role more within the framework of domestic relations. Thus, this popular digital da'wah reinforces religious patriarchy, albeit through affirmative and glorifying language (Giorgi, 2025).

When read through the lens of spiritual agency, female audiences seeking to emulate Khadijah may see themselves not as victims of patriarchy, but rather as spiritual agents who choose to obey and support their husbands for the sake of reward (Linders, 2025). Within this framework, female agency is seen not as resistance to structures, but as piety within the framework of norms (Mesgartejrani et al., 2023). The UAH lecture thus provides space for spiritual agency, but still limits socio-political agency.

The ambivalence of this discourse resurfaces: women are glorified through the figure of Khadijah, but that glory is tied to obedience and loyalty. This sermon gained popularity because it tapped into women's emotional need for a noble role model, while ensuring that such role models remained within a patriarchal framework (Muhammad Jahanzaib Dildar et al., 2024). The popularity of UAH's sermon is understandable because it provided the audience with much-needed recognition, inspiration, and pride, while simultaneously preserving the existing social structure.

The implications of this analysis are important to understand. For Indonesian Muslim women, UAH's lecture on Khadijah can be a source of motivation and a spiritual role model. However, on the other hand, this lecture also functions as an ideological mechanism that normalizes patriarchy. For academics, this analysis illustrates how historical figures are utilised in digital da'wah not only to educate, but also to influence and shape gender identity (Mannerfelt, 2022). Khadijah's representation is not only about the past, but also about how the future of Muslim women is imagined within a patriarchal framework (Malik, 2024).

Thus, the themes of historical figures and role models in UAH's lectures exhibit the same pattern of ambivalence as the previous themes: affirmative narratives that glorify women but still bind them to normative frameworks. Critical discourse analysis shows that the idealization of Khadijah's figure functions as an effective ideological strategy: it provides both recognition and control, inspiration and limitation.

Table 3 AWK Analysis of Historical Figures & Exemplary Themes

Level Fairclough	Evidence/Speech Excerpts	Linguistic & Discursive Analysis	Ideological Function & Social Impact
<b>Text – Hyperbolization &amp; glorification</b>	"Khadijah is the greatest woman in the universe." / "Leader of the women of heaven."	Hyperbolic diction positions Khadijah as a superlative figure. The technique of glorification both awes the audience and makes them bow down to this ideal model.	Forming standards of "perfect" femininity that are almost incomparable → contemporary women are directed to pursue idealistic standards.
<b>Text – Narrative of sacrifice</b>	"Khadija sacrificed all her wealth for the Prophet and Islam."	The emphasis on total sacrifice reinforces the discourse of loyalty. The economic narrative is transformed into spiritual devotion.	Khadijah's economic contribution was not seen as an independent agency, but as evidence of loyalty to her husband.
<b>Text – Narrowing of agency</b>	"Khadijah was great not because of her wealth, but because of her devotion to the Prophet."	The choice of diction narrows the source of greatness → not from business independence, but from domestic devotion.	Limiting the meaning of women's agency → measured by loyalty, not by independent capacity.

<b>Discourse practice – Storytelling format</b>	The talk is packaged as a historical story full of emotions. The audience was made to cry/move.	Emotional storytelling technique → pathos appeal. Shifting historical discourse into a spiritual realm that touches the heart.	Facilitates internalization: female audiences accept narratives uncritically because they are emotionally attached.
<b>Discourse practices – Digital distribution</b>	Viral piece: "Khadijah the greatest woman of all time."	The editing of the cut emphasizes glorification, removing critical nuances.	One-dimensional representation → women only know the ideal-wife version, not the reality of Khadijah's independent business.
<b>Socio-cultural practices – Patriarchal context</b>	Many audiences wrote in the comments: "I want to be a loyal wife like Khadijah."	Public response shows internalization of norms → exemplary behavior = domestic loyalty.	Reinforcing the social expectation that the ideal woman is obedient & supportive.
<b>Subjectivation / Interpellation</b>	Implicit greeting: the audience is invited to "become the Khadijah of this age."	The audience is called as a normative subject → their identity is reshaped through exemplary figures.	Making women self-policing: self-monitoring to follow Khadijah's example.
<b>Ambivalence</b>	UAH mentions Khadijah's business, but emphasizes loyalty to the Prophet as a primary value.	Acknowledge but subordinate strategy: the independent aspect is acknowledged, but placed under the domestic role.	Opening up space for symbolic recognition but still strengthening religious patriarchy.

The table above shows that Khadijah's representation in the UAH lecture operates through ambivalent glorification. At the textual level, Khadijah is positioned as a noble role model, but her greatness is defined through domestic loyalty and sacrifice. At the level of discursive practice, the emotional storytelling style and digital distribution reinforce an affirmative, inspiring message, while obscuring Khadijah's historical complexity as a successful businesswoman. At the level of socio-cultural practice, the audience actively responds by embracing Khadijah's loyalty as a moral standard, which in turn reinforces patriarchal norms in society. Thus, AWK's analysis shows that the narrative about Khadijah is not simply a historical story, but an ideological tool for shaping the identities of contemporary Muslim women (Qotrunnada & Hakim, 2025). The historical figure is used as an example, but one that is simplified to fit the normative framework of patriarchy.

The representation of women in UAH lectures operates within an ambivalent symbolic framework. On the one hand, women are called special beings, guardians of harmony, and even noble role models through the figure of Khadijah. However, on the other hand, this privilege is limited by narratives of "nature," "husband's livelihood," and "family priority," which emphasize that public space for women is secondary. Women may work, achieve, and even become recognized historical figures, but their greatness is always derived from loyalty and fidelity to men (Singh & Singh, 2024). Thus, women are not erased from discourse; they are glorified, but this glory is conditional. Herein lies the paradox of representation: recognition coexists with control (Hall, 1997a).

This kind of discourse does not exist in a vacuum, but is produced and reproduced through highly strategic digital da'wah mechanisms. UAH sermons are often packaged in women-only forums, such as Muslimah studies, and then cut into short clips that easily go viral on social media. This distribution process is crucial, because what captures the public's attention is not the affirmative nuances of "it's okay to work" or "women are valuable," but rather fragments of sentences that emphasize prohibitions or moral requirements, such as "career women be careful" or "providing for a living remains the

responsibility of men." The algorithmic logic of digital platforms reinforces this restrictive aspect, as the most normative and assertive content is more easily captured and reshared (Kokshagina et al., 2023). Thus, digital da'wah is not simply a medium, but an efficient machine for patriarchal reproduction: it selects specific clips and disseminates them widely, shaping social perceptions more massively than conventional pulpits (Ryan Day, 2021).

Indonesia's socio-cultural context also plays a significant role. On the one hand, reality shows that women are increasingly active in the public sphere, working, running businesses, pursuing higher education, and even becoming leaders in various fields. However, on the other hand, patriarchal norms remain strong, demanding that women always prioritize the household (Christianson et al., 2021). UAH's lecture sits squarely in the midst of this tension, offering what could be called an ideological compromise mechanism. She acknowledges the inevitability of women working, but immediately asserts that providing for a living is inherently a male role and that women's work is only legitimate to the extent that it does not conflict with domestic priorities (Siegel). In this way, UAH's lecture simultaneously affirms modern realities and safeguards patriarchal structures, without creating direct conflict.

The ideological implications of this discourse are quite stark. First, it establishes Islam as a source of legitimacy for a subtle patriarchy, rather than a hard patriarchy that rejects women's involvement altogether. Through the glorification of Khadijah's figure or affirmative rhetoric such as "women are special creatures," this discourse appears to glorify women. However, it is precisely through this glorification that women are led to willingly accept normative constraints. Second, this discourse shifts gender issues from structural to moral-spiritual ones. Issues of economic inequality, the distribution of domestic labor, or social injustice are ignored, and the focus is shifted to the question: are women living according to their natural destiny? This shift serves as a powerful ideological strategy, as it encourages women to internalize patriarchal norms as part of piety (T. Mahmood et al., 2005).

In today's digital world, this strategy is even more powerful because social media algorithms actually amplify normative messages. The content that spreads most easily is assertive, simple, and emotional, rather than nuanced or critical (Tefagergish et al., 2022). Thus, religious patriarchy is now maintained not only by the authority of religious scholars but also by the algorithmic logic of digital platforms. Digital da'wah has become a dual ideological apparatus: it connects religious authority with the technological infrastructure that governs what millions of people see, hear, and believe (Althusser, 2024).

From these findings, a new critical idea emerged that can be called affirmative patriarchy. Unlike traditional patriarchy, which openly rejects women's involvement, affirmative patriarchy affirms women through the language of praise, recognition, and glorification. Women are called great, special, even exemplary, but this recognition is always accompanied by conditions: they are great to the extent that they are obedient, special to the extent that they are obedient, exemplary to the extent that they are loyal. This affirmative patriarchy works more effectively than the old patriarchy because it does not provoke frontal resistance. Instead, women accept and even take pride in their domestic roles, because these roles are wrapped in a noble narrative. Using Althusser's framework, the UAH lecture can be understood as a form of interpellation that makes women normative subjects who feel free, even though that freedom has already been defined by its limits (Althusser, 2024).

Contextualization with today's world further demonstrates the strength of affirmative patriarchy. In the era of globalization, the discourse of gender equality is increasingly dominant, and many Muslim women seek ways to negotiate their identities between the demands of modernity and religious norms (Fitryansyah & Sofiyati, 2024). UAH's lecture offered a comforting middle ground: women can be modern, can work, can be highly educated, but must never abandon their natural origins. This middle ground appears moderate, but it actually reinforces patriarchal structures in more sophisticated ways. From an Islamic feminist perspective, this poses a significant challenge, as symbolic recognition of women does not automatically lead to substantive equality (Mernissi, 1991a).

Thus, this study confirms that UAH's YouTube sermons present ambivalent representations of women, produced through effective digital da'wah mechanisms, and hold significant ideological

implications for understanding gender equality in Islam. The notion of affirmative patriarchy emerging from this analysis suggests that the challenge of gender equality today lies not only in confronting outright denial but also in dismantling forms of conditional recognition that appear to be ennobling but are actually limiting. Critical awareness of these mechanisms is crucial for Muslim women to be honored not only symbolically but also to achieve real equality in their social, economic, and spiritual lives (Samier & ElKaleh, 2021).

#### 4. Conclusion

This research systematically addresses the primary questions regarding the representation of women in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's (UAH) YouTube sermons, the mechanisms of production and reproduction of this discourse within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, and its ideological implications for understanding gender equality in Islam. The core findings indicate that the representation of women in UAH's sermons is constructed through a pattern of discursive ambivalence: women are glorified with affirmative rhetoric, but this glorification is consistently locked by normative conditions that emphasize the domestic and spiritual spheres as the primary locus of women's roles. Thus, the recognition granted does not pave the way for substantive equality, but rather reproduces limitations long legitimized by patriarchal structures.

Theoretically, this study broadens the horizons of critical discourse analysis in religion and gender studies by introducing the concept of affirmative patriarchy. This concept offers a new understanding that patriarchy no longer operates solely through explicit rejection, but rather through symbolic strategies of recognition, glorification, and conditional affirmation. By affirming women as "noble" or "special," digital religious discourse creates a more subtle yet more effective mechanism of control, as it forces female subjects to willingly accept normative constraints. These findings contribute to the literature on gender in Islam by demonstrating how religious authorities respond to digital modernity not with outright resistance, but with strategies of ideological compromise that appear benign yet still reinforce gender hierarchies.

The practical implications of this research are significant for various parties. For academics and gender activists, the results emphasize the need for critical literacy in digital da'wah, so that female audiences do not stop at symbolic recognition but are able to encourage transformation toward substantive equality. For da'wah practitioners, these findings encourage the development of more inclusive and egalitarian religious communication strategies, so that da'wah does not merely repeat patriarchal norms but also allows for alternative, more gender-just interpretations.

However, this study has limitations. Its focus solely on UAH's sermons limits generalizations to the entire discourse of Islamic digital da'wah in Indonesia. Furthermore, the research approach, which focuses more on textual analysis, fails to fully explore the audience's receptive experiences, namely how women as consumers of digital da'wah internalize, negotiate, or even reject these normative messages.

Therefore, further research is recommended to adopt a comparative approach involving other religious scholars and preachers in digital spaces, thus obtaining a more diverse mapping of gender representation in contemporary Islam. Furthermore, digital ethnographic studies focusing on audience reception will enrich understanding of the dynamics of resistance and acceptance of affirmative patriarchal discourse. Thus, further research is expected to broaden theoretical and practical horizons in dismantling gender constructions in digital Islam, thereby opening up possibilities for more just and equitable religious practices.

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