Islamic Apologetics and the Commodification of Religion in the Digital Public Space

Iman Mukhroman
Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Serang, Indonesia
iman.mukhroman@untirta.ac.id

Asep Saeful Muhtadi
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
samuh@uinsgd.ac.id

Zaenal Mukarom
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
zaenal.mukarom@uinsgd.ac.id

Hamzah Turmudi
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
hamzah.turmudi@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract:

Insights on the digital transformation of Islamic preaching in Indonesia, for example, highlight how religious practice gets enmeshed with social media's symbolic economy. In this paper, I examine the transition from da'wah to digital commodity in Islamic apologetics through the channel Bang Zuma Official on YouTube, and how faith, authority, and algorithms intersect in the digital public sphere. This study adopts a qualitative interpretive method, building on the analytics of Robert Entman's (1993) framing analysis and Vincent Mosco's (2009) theory of media commodification. The main data are collected from the video "Penyesat Itu Bergelar Yesus Kristus.. Siapa Pengikutnya???"(published March 6, 2025). They are, meaning structure or ideological representation, and the forms of commodification of religion in Bang Zuma's apologetic discourse. The results indicate that Bang Zuma conceptualizes Islam as the 'ultimate truth' and other religions in terms of epistemological distortions. His rhetorical style connects theological argumentation with digital aesthetics, rendering da'wah an ideological spectacle. Three forms of commodification are identified: content (theological messages simplified for viral status), audience (those who consume or engage via donations act out digital fatigue and labour), and indeed the preachers themselves as spiritual labour modified in relation to algorithmic concerns.

Keywords: algorithmic economy; digital da'wah; framing analysis; Islamic apologetics; religious commodification.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become spiritual spaces, providing new ways to express faith (and share and gain certainty about) spirituality in an increasingly connected world. These media have now evolved into spaces where Islamic identities at the individual and community levels

are formed, expressed, and maintained. This phenomenon marks the emergence of digital Islamic apologetics as a contemporary manifestation of theological defense that operates through algorithmic logic and visual economy within the framework of the attention economy. In this empirical context, Islamic apologist figures like Bang Zuma represent the convergence between theological discourse competence and popular cultural aesthetics, systematically transforming conventional religious lectures into digital performances measured through engagement metrics.

Research on the mediatization of religion has shown that media is no longer simply a means of disseminating religious teachings, but also plays an active role in shaping religious experiences and practices (Hjarvard, 2008; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Campbell & Cheong, 2023). In an algorithm-driven and post-truth world, faith is expanding beyond its spiritual, moral, and doctrinal foundations to reflect the core principles embedded in these platforms (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). For devout and tech-savvy Indonesian Muslims, social media is both a space for expressing religious beliefs and an arena for competing interpretations. This raises an important question: how can Islamic broadcasting maintain its moral values while adapting to an algorithm-driven system that relies on sensation, pleasure, and visual appeal?

Several studies highlight that the digitalization of religious da'wah has created a paradox between religious idealism and market logic. Hashmi et al.,(2021) found that the commodification of religious da'wah on social media often results in representations of Islam reduced to imagery and performativity. Meanwhile, Fadilla & Isma Indriyani (2025) showed how digital platforms create a religious influencer economy, where religious figures compete not only for spiritual authority but also for algorithmic popularity. Research by Uswatusolihah et.al.,(2025) on the commodification of da'wah among middle-class Muslim women found that religious training programs are often packaged as paid "packages" that combine spiritual elements with modern lifestyles, making religion a tradable commodity. Recent studies have shown that social media has influenced the way Muslims interpret and practice their religion, with religious content increasing to 30% of total posts on platforms like Instagram and TikTok since 2020 (Larsson & Willander, 2025).

However, some studies still view the mediatization of religion normatively, between secularization and revitalization of faith, without deeply examining how digital apologetics works symbolically and ideologically in social media discourse. In fact, as emphasized by Couldry & Hepp (2013), mediatization must be understood as a social process in which reality (including religious) is constructed through representational practices. At this point, Entman's (1993) framing theory and Berger & Luckmann's (1966) social constructivism become relevant to explain how figures like Bang Zuma formulate apologetic narratives that are acceptable to the digital public, while maintaining theological truth claims.

Bang Zuma has emerged as a cultural phenomenon combining theological rhetoric with visually and emotionally engaging digital narratives. In the context of Islamic communication, he employs an argumentative style that prioritizes a rational defense of Islam to audiences of various faiths. However, this strategy is inseparable from the media logic that drives him to emerge as a competitive content creator within the algorithmic ecosystem. Therefore, digital Islamic apologetics functions not only as a form of ideological defense against the "other," as Hall et al. (2024), but also as a cultural performance produced and consumed within the digital religious marketplace.

This phenomenon intersects with the concept of "The Spectacle of the Other" (Hall, 1997), which explains how identity and difference are represented through visualization and symbolic consumption. In the context of Bang Zuma, apologetics becomes a spectacle constructed to attract audience attention, emotion, and engagement. The power of his religious message stems not only from theological substance, but also from the ability to manage form, style, and visual modality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). This aligns with multimodality analysis, which asserts that meaning is never singular; it is created from a combination of text, image, sound, and gesture (Jewitt, 2017). Thus, apologetic strategies in the digital space are multimodal practices that are simultaneously ideological.

From the social constructionist perspective of Berger & Luckmann (2016), the mediatization of religion can be understood as an arena in which religious reality is reconstructed through symbolic interactions between communicators, media, and audiences. In this context, Bang Zuma utilizes media language to construct structures of plausibility, namely systems of social legitimacy for particular religious views. This demonstrates that the meaning of Islam is constructed not only through sacred texts but also through algorithms, commentary, and performative digital engagement (Campbell, 2021).

However, there has been little in-depth research into digital Islamic apologetics as a mediatized discourse practice. Most studies focus more on the content or phenomenon of celebrity da'wah, such as research (Tabroni

et al., 2025; Fadilla & Isma Indriyani, 2025) without connecting it to the ideological and representational dynamics that emerge from algorithmic logic. This study takes a position by reading Bang Zuma as a case study of how Islamic apologetics is constructed, negotiated, and commercialized in a digital order governed by visibility and performativity.
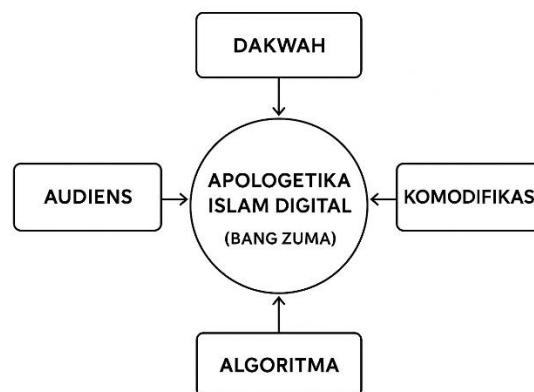
Theoretically, this research combines three major frameworks. First, the mediatization of religion, which highlights the transformation of religion under the logic of media (Hjarvard, 2008; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019). Second, Entman's (1993) Framing Theory which explains issues related to problem definition, causes, moral judgments, and solutions offered in apologetic representations Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001), multimodal analysis, which examines how text, images, and gestures interact to shape ideological messages. These three approaches combine to understand that digital Islamic apologetics is not simply a form of da'wah (preaching), but rather a political arena of representation involving symbolic, algorithmic, and cultural power.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study offers a new reading of the practice of Islamic apologetics in the era of mediatized religion. First, it emphasizes that apologetics operates not only theologically but also culturally—through digital aesthetics that adapt to platform logic. Second, figures like Bang Zuma are represented as a form of algorithmic authority, where religious authority is constructed through content performance, not simply through scholarly chains of narration. Third, this study proposes a dialectical model between da'wah and commodification as the primary mechanism in the formation of digital apologetics discourse in Indonesia.

This research not only documents contemporary phenomena but also emphasizes the importance of reading digital Islamic apologetics as a field of media-mediated religio-cultural meaning construction, namely the process of religious meaning formation that arises from the intersection of faith, technology, and the symbolic market. In such an ecosystem, the values of da'wah are continuously negotiated to remain relevant, engaging, and competitive in the attention economy.

Conceptually, the dialectical relationship between da'wah, commodification, algorithms, and audiences in Bang Zuma's digital Islamic apologetics practice is visualized through the Digital Apologetics Dialectic Model as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Dialectical Model of Digital Islamic Apologetics

Source: Processed by the author, 2025

This model demonstrates that Digital Islamic Apologetics is at the center of the interaction of four main elements that influence each other in a circular fashion: da'wah, commodification, algorithms, and audiences. Da'wah serves as a source of religious values and messages, which are then formatted and commodified to suit the logic of the media market. As intermediaries, algorithms help determine the extent to which messages can spread in the digital public sphere. In this regard, audiences are involved in shaping the continuity of discourse through their participation, commentary, and engagement, which shape the strategies and forms that message dissemination will adopt in seeking its intertextual future. This relationship pattern demonstrates that the phenomenon of digital apologetics is not linear and static, but is also influenced by spiritual values and economic rationality integrated with algorithmic technology.

METHOD

This research uses an interpretive qualitative approach with a framing-based critical discourse analysis. This approach was chosen to understand how Islamic apologetics discourse is constructed, represented, and commodified in the digital space. As stated by Denzin & Lincoln (2011), qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meaning behind the texts, symbols, and communication practices that shape social reality. This approach emphasizes the interpretation of meaning that emerges from the interaction between the communicator (Bang Zuma), the media (YouTube), and the digital audience. The primary data for this study comes from the transcript of Bang Zuma Official's YouTube video titled THE LOST IS TITLED JESUS KRIST ACCORDING TO JESUS.. WHO ARE THE FOLLOWERS??? which was uploaded on March 6, 2025. The video was purposively selected because it contains strong apologetic elements and clearly illustrates the dynamics of religious rhetoric and mediatic logic. Secondary data were obtained from various academic articles, online news, and theoretical literature relevant to the issues of Islamic apologetics, media commodification, and the mediatization of religion. Data collection was carried out in two stages: (1) Digital documentation, namely downloading videos, creating verbatim transcripts, and observing visual elements and interactions in the comments column. (2) Literature study, to strengthen theoretical analysis related to framing, commodification, and social construction of religious reality.

The analysis was conducted using Robert Entman's (1993) framing model, which includes four dimensions: (1) Define Problems, identify the main issues defined in the apologetic discourse; (2) Diagnose Causes, finding the cause or actor to blame; (3) Make Moral Judgment, assess moral and ideological positions; (4) Treatment Recommendation, offers a solution or course of action. The results of the framing analysis are then interpreted using Vincent Mosco's media commodification theory to explore the forms of commodification of content, audience, and labor that emerge in Bang Zuma's digital preaching. Furthermore, Berger & Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality is used to explain how religious reality is reproduced through symbolic interactions between communicators and audiences in the digital space. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of theories and sources. Researchers compared the results of the framing analysis with Mosco and Berger & Luckmann's theories to ensure interpretive consistency. Furthermore, peer debriefing with colleagues was conducted to maintain objectivity and avoid subjective bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mediatization of Religion and Digital Preaching

The development of communication technology over the past decade has brought about significant changes in the way beliefs are formed, religious interactions occur, and religious expressions emerge in the digital public sphere. Hjarvard (2008; Lövheim & Hjarvard (2019); Lundby (2023) propose a theoretical approach that focuses on mediated religion through the concept of communication infrastructure, where the specific characteristics of the media naturally determine the shape and form of the immanent logic and content that will be formed. This conceptualization implies that religion can no longer be understood as an independent entity separate from the media, but rather integrated into a communication ecosystem built by algorithmic systems, visual grammar, and attention economy mechanisms. In the contemporary Indonesian religious landscape, the phenomenon of digital da'wah represents the most concrete empirical manifestation of this process of mediatization.

In the Indonesian context, digital da'wah is the most visible manifestation of this mediatization process. Figures such as Ustaz Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, and Bang Zuma have established religious authority through digital appearances and online interactions (Hannan, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2025; Dahlan et al., 2025; Mukhroman & Halim, 2025). Lövheim & Hjarvard (2019) assert that mediatization gives rise to a new type of religious authority, acquired not only through scholarly traditions but also through visibility shaped by algorithms. This explains why da'wah messages are now often adapted to media formats that demand speed, emotional immediacy, and visual appeal. This phenomenon demonstrates that social media not only disseminates da'wah but also defines the form, style, and rhythm of da'wah itself. This is where the concept of mediatization becomes a gateway to understanding the transformation of Islamic apologetics into a performative and competitive digital format.

To analyze how religious messages are constructed in digital spaces, this study uses Robert Entman's (1993) framing theory. According to him, framing is the process of selecting certain aspects of reality and then

highlighting them to construct a coherent meaning (Entman, 1993). Entman identifies four main elements of framing: (1) Defining the main issues of concern; (2) Diagnosing the cause or party deemed responsible; (3) Making a moral judgment on a situation; (4) Recommending a solution or desired action. In the context of Bang Zuma's digital preaching, these four elements are clearly visible. He defines the problem as a theological deviation outside of Islam, diagnoses its cause through a narrative of distorted revelation, makes a moral judgment that Islam is the absolute truth, and offers a solution in the form of a return to monotheism. Therefore, framing becomes a discursive strategy for establishing ideological legitimacy in front of a digital audience. However, framing in the context of social media is not neutral. It is subject to visual and algorithmic logic, so theological messages are packaged in a way that attracts attention, evokes emotion, and is easily shared. This is what makes Bang Zuma's framing not only religious but also performative and mediatically strategic.

The next theoretical framework is Vincent Mosco's theory of media commodification. Mosco explains that in a capitalist communication system, media functions as a mechanism for the production and exchange of meanings that have economic value (Mosco, 2000;Mosco, 2009). Commodification in this context encompasses three dimensions: (1) Commodification of content, when a message or idea is turned into a commercial product; (2) Audience commodification, when the audience's attention is turned into economic data that can be monetized; (3) Commodification of labor, when content producers become part of digital capitalist work. These three dimensions are highly relevant to understanding Islamic apologetics on YouTube, where theological messages are packaged in viral content formats, audiences participate as algorithmic labor, and preachers act as spiritual workers within a symbolic economy. This process demonstrates that religion is undergoing a shift in function, from a value system to a cultural product governed by the digital market and the attention economy. Commodification is not always negative; in some contexts, it is an adaptive strategy to keep religious values relevant and acceptable to digital audiences (Uswatusolihah et.al.2025). However, when spiritual value is measured by views and engagement, there's a risk of reducing faith to mere algorithmic performance.

As a philosophical framework, this study also utilizes Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality. According to them, social reality is constructed through three dialectical processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 2016). In the context of digital media, this means that religious meaning does not exist naturally but is constructed through symbolic interactions between preachers, media, and audiences. Bang Zuma externalized his religious views through digital content production; these messages were then objectified in videos, comments, and algorithms; and ultimately re-internalized by audiences who affirmed his beliefs through digital interactions. This process produces a new plausibility structure, a system of social legitimacy in which religious truth derives not only from sacred texts but also from the public resonance generated in digital spaces. Berger and Luckmann's theory helps explain how apologetic discourse is not only conveyed but also constructed and negotiated through interactive and algorithmic mediatic mechanisms.

The three frameworks above—framing (Entman), commodification (Mosco), and social construction (Berger & Luckmann)—are combined to construct a comprehensive analytical model. Framing explains how the meaning of apologetics is formed at the discourse level; commodification explains how that meaning is produced and marketed under the logic of the media; while social construction explains how audiences internalize religious messages through symbolic interactions in the digital space.

Conceptually, the relationship between the three is visualized as a dialectical model of da'wah-commodification-algorithm (see Figure 1), in which religion, media, and the symbolic market influence each other in a circular fashion. This model asserts that Islamic apologetics in the digital era is a product of the dynamic interaction between faith, technology, and symbolic capitalism, which together shape a new religious reality in the digital public sphere.

Bang Zuma: A Case Study

An analysis of the video "THE LEADER HAS THE TITLE OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JESUS.. WHO ARE HIS FOLLOWERS???" from the Bang Zuma Official channel (uploaded March 6, 2025) shows that the discourse of Islamic apologetics in the digital space not only displays theological defense, but also functions as a form of ideological performance packaged with algorithmic logic and popular aesthetics.

Picture 1. Screenshot of the video THE LEADER HAS THE TITLE OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JESUS... WHO ARE HIS FOLLOWERS???

Based on Robert Entman's (1993) framework, the results of the framing analysis can be explained through the following four dimensions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgment, and recommending treatment. Bang Zuma defined the core problem as a crisis of truth and the distortion of non-Islamic religious teachings, particularly regarding the figure of Jesus Christ, which he called "man-made." He positioned Islam as a rational and consistent theological system, while Christianity was seen as having lost the authenticity of its revelation. In this framing, YouTube functions as an arena for proving truth, where da'wah is positioned not merely as worship but also as an epistemological debate. The central issue constructed is not only theological but also symbolic: who has the right to define truth in the digital public sphere?

Bang Zuma attributed the cause of this truth crisis to human distortion of God's revelation and the dominance of Western secular logic. He believed that the distortion of the meaning of divinity resulted from the intervention of modern rationalism, which has pushed aside divine values. In the narrative, the "deviant" is not just a specific figure, but rather a non-Islamic system of thought deemed to be leading the people astray. Thus, the cause of the problem is personified in "deviant" figures and ideas, creating a kind of othering discourse, a distinction between "us" (Muslims) and "them" (the deviants).

Bang Zuma uses strong moral and theological language to frame Islam as the highest moral and epistemological authority. He cites verses from the Quran and the Hadith as the basis for his arguments, thereby strengthening Islam's position as the ultimate truth. Bang Zuma's emotional, rhetorical, and communicative style constructs a moral judgment that Islam is not only "true," but also that it "saves" people from erroneous thinking and misguided beliefs. This framework not only conveys a religious message but also evokes emotions that enhance the content's appeal on YouTube.

Bang Zuma's proposed solution is a return to monotheism and Islamic rationality. He emphasizes the importance of critical thinking based on faith and urges his audience to abandon secular logic, which he deems misleading. However, in a digital context, these recommendations also have performative implications: calls to subscribe, like, and share content. In this context, religious action blends with algorithmic action, where spiritual participation simultaneously enhances the visibility and monetization of preaching.

Table 1. Robert Entman's Framing Analysis of the Bang Zuma Official Narrative

Framing Elements (Robert Entman)	Description of Framing Analysis in Bang Zuma Official's Narrative
Define Problems	The main problem is defined as the distortion of Jesus' teachings in Christianity, which have been manipulated by biblical authors like Luke and Paul. Bang Zuma positions Christians as victims of "theological error" for accepting dogma without rational verification. He considers the teachings of Jesus' ascension to heaven and his divinity to be epistemic and historical problems, rather than revelations. This narrative constructs the image that modern Christology is a product of human invention, not the word of God.
Diagnose Causes	The causes of heresy are traced to the false authority of the Gospel writers (such as Luke, who was not an eyewitness), as well as Satan's intervention in Paul's teachings. In his discursive logic, Christian theological deviation is the result of Satan's "rule of the world" (referring to Luke 4:5–8) and a spiritual distortion of the original revelation. Thus, the root of the problem is not simply differences in interpretation, but rather the influence of dark forces that obscure the truth of monotheism.
Make Moral Judgment	Bang Zuma believes that Christian teachings lack moral and epistemological legitimacy because they are derived from inauthentic texts. He positions Islam as a religion of reform and the perfecting of revelation (replacing Judaism and Christianity). Through political metaphors ("old order-new order-reformation"), he asserts Islam's superiority as the final true religion. His moral judgment is apologetic-confrontational: opposing heresy while calling for spiritual enlightenment through the Quran.
Treatment Recommendation	The solution offered is a return to pure monotheism, namely worshiping God without the intermediary of Jesus or spirits. He invites Christians to rationally examine his scriptures and engage in open dialogue, even with challenges or financial contests, to prove that the one who came to Paul was Jesus, the son of Mary. This approach supports the use of digital apologetics to prove the truth of Islam and change public understanding of the authenticity of revelation. Ideologically, Bang Zuma's method is persuasive and dominant, aiming to position Islam as the sole source of truth in the online public sphere.

Textual analysis reveals that Bang Zuma's apologetics is not grounded in a neutral spiritual position. It has two concurrent dimensions: (1) The theological dimension, which affirms Islam as the ultimate truth; and (2) The media dimension, namely the transformation of truth into visual and symbolic objects. In short, digital apologetics marks a new chapter in the politics of religious representation in the era of algorithms. Da'wah is not only the preacher's duty to spread the truth, but also the production of symbolic values measured through likes, views, and engagement. In this case, religion becomes a cultural commodity, and theological truth is transformed into content tailored to the demands of the media and digital markets.

Bang Zuma's content analysis reveals several common apologetic practices that he employs in cyberspace. Zuma frequently uploads videos refuting anti-Islamic instructions or slander against Islam found online. In these videos, he uses theology or secular logic, such as comparing interpretations and refuting public misconceptions. This approach is consistent with the findings of the Framing Religious Hoaxes study, which shows that refuting religious hoaxes is fundamental to maintaining the image of religion and Islamic identity in the digital age (Fathurrohman et al., 2024). Zuma also uses live broadcasts for interactive and sometimes confrontational debates. These debates provide a space for narrative confrontation, where opponents raise secular concerns or challenge Islamic teachings, which Zuma counters with sometimes dramatic rebuttals. This format has two characteristics: first, preaching that must be explained, and second, theater due to its tension, provocation, and audience receptivity. Short-form content, such as video reels or clips with apologetic punchlines, easily goes viral. This content typically presents apologetic arguments in a concise, visually engaging format, sometimes with dramatic editing effects, and interspersed with humor or a lighthearted style, making it easier for younger audiences to digest and share. Bang Zuma built a persona as an "apologetic young man" who is close to the millennial generation or Gen Z. This persona is not just an identity, but also a communication strategy: narrative, speaking style, content choices, and visual aesthetics are developed so that the audience feels Bang Zuma is

relatable/unfiltered. This branding strengthens audience trust and loyalty, which then increases engagement, subscribers/followers, and monetization potential.

The Commodification of Religion in the Algorithmic Era

The phenomenon of Bang Zuma's Islamic apologetics on YouTube demonstrates that digital da'wah cannot be separated from the logic of media capitalism and the attention economy. According to Mosco (2009), digital da'wah involves three main forms of commodification: content, audience, and labor. This process demonstrates how religious messages shift from purely spiritual value to symbolic currency that can be monetized through platform algorithms. In this section, complex theological messages are simplified into a digestible and viral storyline. Concepts about God, prophecy, and critiques of atheism are conveyed through concise and engaging video rhetoric, capable of evoking emotion and engaging the audience.

This description aligns with what Mosco (2009), calls the commodification of content, whereby spiritual content and values are transformed into symbolic, marketable commodities. Today, religious ideas are judged not only by their moral worth but also by their algorithmic efforts: how many clicks will they generate? How many likes? How many comments? How much money will they raise in donations? In the commodification of content, theological truth is increasingly governed by the logic of the platform, rather than solely by religious authority. Lectures become communication products competing in a digital symbolic marketplace, where speed, sensation, and visual aesthetics are more important than the depth of argument.

Commodification also occurs at the audience level. Viewers are no longer simply recipients of religious messages, but rather become part of the digital workforce (audience labor) that contributes to the platform's economic circulation. Every interaction—likes, comments, shares, donations, and TikTok gifts—consists of economic data utilized by the algorithmic system to increase content visibility and monetization. According to Choirin et al. (2025), audiences in the context of digital da'wah work unwittingly as producers of economic value, because their participation directly increases the potential income of creators and platforms. In this context, the audience's religious activities (such as amen to comments or sharing Islamic preaching videos) serve a dual purpose: they are both an expression of faith and the production of symbolic capital. Islamic preaching becomes a form of spiritual prosumerism, where religious consumption also means the production of economic value.

Bang Zuma himself occupies a dual role as both a digital preacher and a digital worker. He not only delivers Islamic messages but also carries out content production functions that are subject to the logic of algorithms and the rhythms of digital capitalism. As a creator, he must maintain consistency in production, relevance, visual quality, and engagement to survive in the competitive social media ecosystem. According to Mosco (2009), this is the commodification of labor, where spiritual and intellectual energy is transformed into corporate work that creates economic value. Da'wah is no longer simply a moral calling, but a digital profession that requires the highest levels of productivity and performativity. A da'i now functions as a "spiritual worker" in a symbolic capitalist system where respect is measured through algorithms.

Preaching as an Algorithmic Performance

The phenomenon of Bang Zuma's apologetics represents the mediatization of religion, as described by Hjarvard (2008), in which religious forms, functions, and expressions are reconfigured by the logic of digital media. In this context, da'wah (preaching) not only becomes a means of spreading Islamic teachings but also appears as an algorithmic performance subject to mechanisms of visibility, performative aesthetics, and platform calculations. Emotional rhetoric, theatrical speaking styles, and the use of provocative titles form what Campbell & Cheong, 2023), call the spectacle of religion, where faith, spirituality, and religious authority are presented as a form of mass-consumed spiritual entertainment. Da'wah on social media, therefore, operates as a performative practice that combines moral messages, branding strategies, and visual drama to capture public attention in the attention economy. Furthermore, platform algorithms function as curators of truth, determining which content is deemed worthy of viewing, sharing, and dissemination. Within this ecosystem, platform algorithms function as curators of truth, determining which content is deemed worthy of viewing and sharing. Within this framework, religious authority shifts from the authority of the chain of knowledge to algorithmic authority. Recent examples demonstrate that religious content creators are shaped not only by their religious scholarly background, but also by their digital engagement performance and mastery of platform logic (Sierocki, 2024). The validity of a preaching message now depends not on spiritual depth or scholarly credibility, but rather on digital performance, number of views, level of interaction, and resonance in the online public sphere.

Digital da'wah is no longer merely a religious activity, but also a mediated religious performance, as belief in narrative vectors and aesthetics of visibility. In this algorithmically regulated space, religion becomes a semiotic and performative object, while spiritual values are negotiated through the rhythms of engagement and machine calculations. On the other hand, Muhtadi (2019) reminds us of the sensitivity of religious communicators who must use da'wah language that respects the principles of religious sanctity, so that digital da'wah does not lose its spiritual side in the face of the demands of digital visibility, but rather is able to fulfill its function as a means of dialogue and harmonious friendship in the spirit of *rahmatan lil alamin*. The digitalization of da'wah requires an understanding of how participatory media contributes to public action. Turmudi (2019) explains that participatory media has three main characteristics: public-to-many, where everyone can share; participatory, where the broad participation of many individuals makes the media valuable to them; and networked, which enables connections on a larger scale and faster communication. In the context of Islamic apologetics in the digital space, these characteristics create a dilemma: on the one hand, they facilitate the mass dissemination of religious messages, but on the other hand, they require the content to adapt to a participatory logic that demands active engagement. Therefore, spiritual messages must be packaged in formats that encourage participation amidst the competition for digital attention.

The Dialectic of Spirituality and Symbolic Capitalism

While commodification practices carry the risk of diminishing religious values, the phenomenon of digital da'wah also demonstrates how apologetic practices can creatively adapt to the logic of modern media and the attention economy. Recent research by Fadilla & Isma Indriyani (2025) found that digital Islamic da'wah in Indonesia is conditioned by platform algorithms that prioritize engagement and visibility. In reality, spiritual value is often measured by views, likes, comments, and donations rather than pure theological depth (Fadilla & Isma Indriyani, 2025). Within this framework, da'wah content becomes a product that can be bought and sold symbolically.

At the same time, commodification in Bang Zuma's case is not an entirely negative process. However, it is not necessarily a bad thing; rather, it is an evolutionary step to maintain presence and existence in a highly competitive algorithmic landscape. Commodification, in this sense, becomes a kind of middle ground where the sea is navigated in such a way that da'wah (Islamic preaching) does not lose its direction, spiritual values are maintained, but also adapts to the platform's logic of providing visibility and performance. This phenomenon highlights the dialectic between spirituality and the symbolic market: on the one hand, there is a demand for the sanctity of religious messages; on the other, there is a need for these messages to be appealing and visible in the digital realm. Digital da'wah has become an arena of ongoing negotiation: how to package divine messages in media formats without losing their essence, while also adapting to the mechanisms of information capitalism—the logic of algorithms, visibility, and symbolic capital.

Mukarom et al. (2024) noted that despite the widespread dissemination of Islamic teachings through digital technology, it also appropriately cautioned against non-Islamic content. Digital literacy is crucial to ensure technology is used responsibly and does not become a vehicle for the spread of disinformation. The real challenge in creating Islamic apologetic content is finding a balance between the appeal of algorithm-driven engagement and maintaining the spiritual integrity at the heart of apologetics. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, digital visibility and engagement can be understood as new symbolic capital that determines social legitimacy in mediatized spaces. Recent examples show that digital religious actors derive legitimacy not solely from traditional sanad (religious lineage) or authority, but from the performance of visibility and resonance on digital platforms (Annaki et al., 2025). In this context, spirituality is no longer merely an internal experience or a closed community, but rather an experience that is displayed, measured, and evaluated in an algorithmic public arena.

Within this framework, we can also read that symbolic capitalism in digital da'wah operates through three key mechanisms: (1) content selection based on visual and emotional appeal, (2) platform orientation towards engagement metrics as a benchmark for da'wah success, and (3) the production of religious identity packaged as a media product as well as social consumption. As stated by (Uswatusolihah et al. 2025) that religion on social media lives in an ecosystem where spiritual values are transformed into numbers, metrics, and rankings, an attention economy that demands performance. This study highlights that digital Islamic apologetics should not be viewed as a rigid separation between pure spirituality and total capitalism. Rather, it is a dynamic space where faith, technology, and the symbolic market continuously interact. Digital da'wah is formed as a mediated

religio-cultural process, where religious meaning is continuously shaped by platform algorithms, visibility trends, and the aesthetics of online presence.

Synthesis of Discussion

The empirical findings of this study confirm that contemporary Islamic apologetics practices are undergoing structural transformation through two concurrent and interconnected mechanisms: mediatization and commodification. These two processes do not operate independently, but rather build upon each other within a digital ecosystem that fundamentally alters how apologetic discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed in the digital public sphere (Hjarvard ,2008; Lövheim & Hjarvard 2019; Lundby, 2023). In addition, the results of this study validate the initial theoretical assumption that digital Islamic apologetics cannot be understood linearly or unidirectionally, but rather must be analyzed as a cyclical-interactive phenomenon at the center of the interaction of four constitutive elements: (1) da'wah as a theological mission, (2) commodification as the platform's economic-political logic, (3) algorithms as technical infrastructure for content curation, and (4) audiences as consumption-participation actors. These four elements form a digital Islamic apologetics ecosystem that dynamically influences each other, creating a feedback loop that continuously reshapes the practice, substance, and purpose of Islamic apologetics itself. The commodification of Islamic apologetics in the digital public sphere cannot be understood in a linear or unidimensional manner. Instead, this phenomenon must be analyzed as the emergent nature of the cyclical interaction of four constitutive elements: da'wah, commodification, algorithms, and audiences. These four elements do not operate independently or sequentially, but rather in a simultaneous and mutually reinforcing feedback loop, creating a complex, ambiguous, and constantly changing apologetics ecosystem.

This research demonstrates that religion in the algorithmic era is not simply a communicated text, but rather a reality mediated, produced, negotiated, and consumed within the digital ecosystem. In this context, Bang Zuma's Apologetics activities are a concrete manifestation of Islamic faith as a digital performance, where religion is exhibited, staged, and traded for profit. Vigilance against this trend is crucial to prevent digital da'wah from being swept away by the currents of symbolic capitalism that dominate the religious public sphere in our era.

Based on Mosco's (2009) commodification theory, this study identifies three main types of commodification in digital apologetics: Commodification of content, commodification of audiences, and commodification of labor. These three activities demonstrate that religion is not only mediated but also produced, staged, and traded within the media system. Islamic apologetics for the digital age, therefore, is a dialectical interaction between spirituality and symbolic capitalism, where faith meets the market, and *da'wah* adapts to algorithms.

Referring to the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 2023), such religious reality is not considered something that already exists, but is formed through the interaction between communicators, media, and audiences. Da'wah takes the form of a social technology that not only transfers spiritual values, but also creates new practices in experiencing religion through visual, algorithmic, and participatory means. This study explores a political economy approach to the concept of commodity fetishism in the context of digital religion and provides insights into the commodification of religion, combining framing theory and the political economy of communication on the one hand, and connecting this duo to the social construction of reality on the other. The dialectical model of da'wah-commodification-audience-algorithm found shows that religious reality is increasingly shaped in response to the interaction between meaning structures, symbolic economies, and intermediary technologies (Salamon, 2024). This finding opens up space for the formulation of a new idea of the algorithmic commodification of religion, which suggests that algorithms operate not only as spiritual but also as economic intermediaries. For preachers and religious organizations, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of digital literacy and media ethics. Digital speech is inextricably linked to algorithmic logic. Therefore, we need communication strategies that allow messages to maintain their purity while adapting to the platform's operating system. For the digital environment, this research serves as an important meditative element to ensure that religious media consumption is not limited to spiritual entertainment but becomes a space for objective dialogue and moral development. Commodification can expand the reach of da'wah through increased mediatization, but it also exposes our faith to the risk of being reduced to mere algorithmic execution. Therefore, there must be a moral awareness that clicks, views, and donations are both spiritual and financial transactions. Da'wah must be anchored in principles of honesty, social concern, and responsibility, not simply for visibility and popularity.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Islamic apologetics in the digital era, as represented by Bang Zuma, is a response to the epistemological and economic shifts in current da'wah. By applying Robert Entman's (1993) analytical framework, this study finds that Bang Zuma develops an apologetic narrative by portraying Islam as the truest path and marginalizing other religions as epistemological variations. This discursive space creates a religious discourse that carries a secular image, characterised as antagonistic, rational, and performative. However, in the digital space of social media, things are not entirely neutral. The symbolic economy of digital da'wah requires visibility, participation, and monetization. As a result, digital Islamic apologetics operates as a mediated religious space, where truth, authority, and spirituality are debated as part of a public performance dictated by the attention economy. This marks the emergence of a new era in religious communication where faith is no longer simply believed but also displayed, measured, and traded. The dialectical model of da'wah–commodification–audience–algorithm demonstrates that religious reality is increasingly shaped by the reciprocal relationship between structures of meaning, symbolic economies, and technological media. This observation opens up space for the emergence of a new concept, the algorithmic commodification of religion, which focuses more on how algorithms become both spiritual and economic mediators.

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