Ulama and Zakat Literacy: A Social Media Discourse Analysis on Da'wah Practices

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Abstract

This study explores the pivotal role of ulama in disseminating zakat education through digital da'wah practices on social media platforms. Against the backdrop of growing digital religiosity and socio-economic inequalities, the research examines how ulama articulate zakat-related discourse to influence Muslim communities online. Utilizing discourse analysis methodology, this study investigates qualitative data sourced from sermons, posts, and digital content disseminated by prominent ulama on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. The analysis is grounded in Islamic communication theory and socio-religious pedagogical frameworks to assess the effectiveness, consistency, and theological depth of their messaging. Findings suggest that ulama play a transformative role in contextualizing zakat as both a spiritual and socio-economic obligation, often emphasizing its relevance to contemporary issues like poverty alleviation, ethical wealth distribution, and community solidarity. However, the study also identifies variations in interpretative approaches, digital engagement strategies, and audience responsiveness. These findings highlight the dynamic intersection between religious authority, digital media, and financial ethics in Islam. The study contributes to scholarship on digital da'wah, Islamic pedagogy, and faith-based economic discourse, while offering strategic insights for enhancing zakat awareness through effective religious communication in the digital age.

Keywords

Ulama; Zakat education; digital da'wah; social media discourse; Islamic

Introduction

The dissemination of Islamic teachings in the modern era has undergone a transformative shift due to the increasing integration of digital technologies. Among the various Islamic teachings, zakat—an essential pillar of Islam—remains both a spiritual obligation and a social mechanism for wealth redistribution. Historically, the ulama (Islamic scholars) have played a central role in educating communities about zakat, ensuring both theological understanding and practical application (Ali & Hatta, 2021). As Muslims increasingly turn to digital platforms for religious knowledge, the role of ulama has expanded into new domains, especially social media, which offers a dynamic and far-reaching medium for da'wah (Ismail et al., 2022). The interaction between traditional religious authority and modern communication tools raises important questions about how zakat is interpreted, promoted, and internalized in a digitally connected world.

Contemporary scholarship acknowledges the profound impact of digital da'wah in shaping religious discourse and community behavior (Anderson, 2020; Hussain, 2023). Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have not only diversified the audience for Islamic knowledge but also altered the form and frequency of religious engagement. Within this context, the role of ulama as educators on zakat is particularly significant, as they bridge classical jurisprudence with modern socio-economic realities. Studies show that when ulama integrate religious instruction with socio-economic narratives, they can influence attitudes toward zakat compliance and financial ethics (Rahman & Suhaimi, 2021, p. 233; Asad, 2022). This highlights the need for scholarly investigation into the strategies and content employed by ulama in their digital zakat da'wah.

From a theoretical standpoint, the communication of religious teachings via digital media involves multiple layers of interpretation and audience reception. The integration of discourse analysis in Islamic studies allows for a critical understanding of how meanings are constructed, contested, and disseminated (Fairclough, 2013, p. 47). Applying discourse analysis to the zakat messages of ulama on social media enables researchers to uncover patterns, themes, and theological nuances embedded within the content. It also allows for examination of how digital audiences interact with these messages, potentially reshaping their understanding and practice of zakat. Furthermore, the pedagogical methods of the ulama, as mediated through digital platforms, reflect broader shifts in religious authority and educational paradigms in the Muslim world (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003, p. 55; Nasr, 2023).

Empirically, research on zakat has often focused on policy, distribution mechanisms, and institutional frameworks, while limited attention has been paid to the role of individual ulama in public education and advocacy (Kahf, 2021; Hassan & Noor, 2024). This gap is particularly evident in the digital context, where religious messages are increasingly consumed in fragmented and algorithm-driven environments. Moreover, while previous studies have addressed the effectiveness of online da'wah in general

(Ahmad et al., 2022), there remains a critical need to analyze the specific discourse strategies employed by ulama to promote zakat consciousness. This includes understanding their theological framing, rhetorical approaches, and engagement with contemporary socio-economic issues within Islamic jurisprudence.

Given these observations, this study aims to answer the following research questions: How do ulama construct zakat-related messages in their digital da'wah? What discursive strategies do they employ to engage digital audiences on the topic of zakat? And how do these strategies influence public understanding and practice of zakat in the context of digital religiosity? The study is guided by the objective of analyzing the discursive and pedagogical practices of ulama on social media to enhance our understanding of religious education in the digital era. It seeks to contribute to Islamic pedagogy, communication studies, and zakat research by illuminating the evolving relationship between religious authority and digital platforms in shaping socio-economic ethics and religious compliance.

Literature Review

The existing body of literature on zakat education underscores its central role in promoting socio-economic justice and religious obligation within Islamic thought. Scholars have examined zakat not only as a tool for wealth redistribution but also as a moral imperative that reflects broader Islamic values of compassion, equity, and communal responsibility (Kahf, 2021; Benthall, 2022). The ulama serve as custodians of this religious duty, historically providing instruction on its theological underpinnings and jurisprudential applications (Nasr, 2023, p. 112). With the advent of digital communication, however, their role has expanded to include new media channels, prompting a reevaluation of how religious knowledge is transmitted and received. Studies have shown that digital platforms allow for the rapid dissemination of Islamic teachings but also introduce challenges related to authenticity, authority, and interpretation (Hussain, 2023; Anderson, 2020).

Literature on digital da'wah emphasizes the transformative potential of social media in shaping religious consciousness, particularly among youth and digitally literate Muslims. Scholars such as Ismail et al. (2022) argue that platforms like YouTube and Instagram allow ulama to reach diverse audiences, utilize multimedia formats, and personalize religious instruction. This aligns with emerging pedagogical frameworks that emphasize accessibility, interactivity, and contextual relevance in religious education (Rahman & Suhaimi, 2021, p. 229; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003, p. 67). However, while much of the literature celebrates the democratizing potential of digital da'wah, other researchers caution against the dilution of religious authority and the rise of unqualified influencers presenting themselves as religious scholars (Ahmad et al., 2022). The discourse analytical approach, therefore, provides a methodological lens to critically examine the content and structure of digital zakat messaging by ulama,

bridging gaps in scholarship related to religious authority, online education, and socio-economic ethics in Islam..

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Islamic Communication Theory, which emphasizes the role of ulama as communicators of divine guidance, mediators of religious meaning, and moral educators. Islamic Communication Theory integrates classical Islamic epistemology—derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and fiqh—with modern communication principles (Nasr, 2023, p. 76; El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2019). It frames religious discourse not merely as information transmission but as an act of spiritual formation and social influence. Within this model, ulama function not only as conveyors of zakat jurisprudence but also as facilitators of moral reasoning, engaging with followers in dialogic spaces such as social media. Their credibility, rhetorical style, and theological alignment significantly shape audience reception and behavioral change (Ali & Hatta, 2021).

A second theoretical lens used is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines how power, ideology, and identity are constructed and reinforced through language. CDA allows this research to explore how ulama construct religious authority and moral responsibility in their online zakat discourses. This method is especially suited for analyzing social media content, where meaning is produced through both linguistic elements and multimodal features such as visuals, hashtags, and comment interactions (Fairclough, 2013, p. 89). CDA also enables a critical examination of how zakat narratives intersect with broader societal themes, such as poverty, inequality, and state responsibility, thus revealing implicit ideologies and contestations in religious messaging (Wodak & Meyer, 2022).

Social Learning Theory further informs this study by highlighting how individuals learn behaviors and values through observation and imitation of role models (Bandura, 2002, p. 119). When ulama present zakat as both a personal and communal duty, framed through storytelling, analogies, and contemporary examples, they enhance the moral engagement and retention of their audience. This is especially relevant in digital contexts where repeated exposure to influential figures increases the likelihood of internalizing their messages. Social media provides a feedback loop in which viewers not only consume content but also respond, share, and emulate it, thus amplifying the pedagogical impact of the ulama (Ismail et al., 2022).

Finally, the study draws on the Theory of Religious Pedagogy, which contextualizes teaching within a framework that values tradition, adaptability, and learner-centric approaches (Halstead, 2021, p. 156). Religious pedagogy encourages critical reflection and ethical reasoning rooted in scriptural sources, while also addressing the socio-cultural realities of learners. In the case of digital zakat da'wah, ulama act as both theologians and educators, adjusting their language, tone, and examples to the

perceived needs of their audiences. This framework supports the argument that religious communication in digital spaces requires a nuanced blend of authenticity, engagement, and strategic adaptation (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003, p. 83).

By integrating these theories, the study constructs a multidimensional analytical framework to interpret the da'wah discourse of ulama on zakat. Islamic Communication Theory provides the normative foundation; Critical Discourse Analysis reveals ideological subtexts; Social Learning Theory explains behavioral influence; and Religious Pedagogy offers educational insights. Together, they form a robust foundation for evaluating how ulama leverage digital media to promote zakat education and transform religious understanding in contemporary contexts.

Previous Research

In 2018, Abdullah and Hamat explored how Islamic scholars adapted to new media landscapes by analyzing YouTube da'wah channels. Their study found that ulama increasingly used storytelling and audiovisual tools to explain complex religious concepts, including zakat. While the research emphasized content accessibility, it lacked focus on how digital platforms influence message interpretation. This early work laid the groundwork for considering social media as a viable arena for religious pedagogy.

By 2019, Auda and Mahmoud investigated the impact of online religious influencers on charitable behaviors among young Muslims. The study, grounded in behavioral economics, showed a correlation between engaging digital content and increased zakat donations. However, it failed to differentiate between certified ulama and untrained influencers, thereby overlooking questions of legitimacy and theological depth in zakat messaging. Their findings highlighted the need for more refined assessments of religious authority in digital spaces.

In 2020, Al-Rashid conducted a discourse analysis of Twitter campaigns led by ulama during Ramadan. The study revealed that posts emphasizing collective responsibility and moral urgency elicited higher engagement rates. Although the research provided insights into language patterns, it lacked an educational dimension and did not evaluate the theological grounding of zakat messages. This study demonstrated how emotional framing can impact digital da'wah effectiveness.

Hassan and Noor's 2021 research focused on Islamic NGOs and their collaboration with ulama to educate the public about zakat through Instagram and Facebook. Their qualitative interviews revealed that credible ulama enhanced community trust and zakat compliance. The study underscored the importance of religious legitimacy but did not analyze the discursive strategies employed in these campaigns. The absence of detailed discourse analysis limited the depth of understanding about how messages were constructed and received.

In 2022, Ismail et al. expanded the scope by examining how ulama tailored their zakat communication strategies for specific digital audiences. Their research found that younger audiences responded more positively to concise, visual, and interactive formats. This study contributed significantly to understanding the pedagogical choices of ulama, although it did not explicitly link these strategies to long-term behavioral change. The study emphasized format over content depth.

Most recently, in 2023, Rahman and Suhaimi conducted a multi-platform content analysis on the theological consistency of zakat messages delivered by ulama. They found varying interpretations of zakat eligibility criteria, which often reflected local socio-political contexts. Their findings pointed to the complex interplay between tradition and modernity but did not address how audiences interpret and internalize these messages. This gap suggested the need for a model that integrates communication, pedagogy, and behavioral outcomes.

Taken together, these studies offer valuable insights into the role of ulama in digital zakat education but leave a critical research gap. Existing literature has either focused on technological formats, audience behavior, or institutional partnerships, without synthesizing how ulama construct and communicate zakat discourses within a pedagogical and theological framework. Moreover, there is insufficient attention to how these messages are perceived and acted upon by digital audiences. This study addresses these limitations by applying discourse analysis to examine the communicative strategies of ulama on social media and by grounding its analysis in communication, behavioral, and pedagogical theories to offer a holistic understanding of digital zakat da'wah.

Research Methods

This study utilizes qualitative textual data, focusing specifically on the linguistic and visual content disseminated by ulama on major social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. The data comprises sermon transcripts, post captions, video dialogues, and user interactions collected between 2021 and 2023. The nature of the data is inherently interpretive and discursive, aligning with the objectives of discourse analysis that seeks to uncover meaning, ideology, and pedagogical strategies embedded within religious communication (Fairclough, 2013, p. 61). Such qualitative data provides rich insights into not only what is communicated but also how it is framed, legitimized, and received within virtual Islamic communities (Wodak & Meyer, 2022).

The primary sources of data include public posts and videos published by recognized ulama, as well as associated user comments and interactions. These ulama were selected based on their digital presence, religious credentials, and thematic focus on zakat education. Secondary sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and official reports from Islamic charitable institutions that contextualize the

theological, communicative, and socio-economic dimensions of zakat (Nasr, 2023, p. 85; Kahf, 2021). This blend of primary and secondary sources ensures a triangulated perspective, supporting the credibility and relevance of the discourse analysis findings (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2019).

Data collection was conducted through document and media content analysis. Videos were transcribed, and posts were coded using NVivo to identify patterns, themes, and discursive structures. This methodological approach is consistent with previous research in digital religion and allows for an organized, systematic examination of how ulama present zakat messages (Ismail et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2022). Selection criteria for the content included frequency of posts, theological depth, audience engagement, and clarity of zakat-related topics. This approach also allowed the study to capture real-time interactions between scholars and followers, offering a more dynamic and contextualized analysis.

For data analysis, thematic discourse analysis was employed, incorporating both inductive and deductive coding strategies. Initial coding involved identifying recurring zakat themes such as niyyah (intention), mustahiq (zakat recipients), and maslahah (public interest). These themes were then mapped against communication strategies, rhetorical devices, and audience responses to evaluate pedagogical effectiveness. The deductive approach was informed by the theoretical frameworks of Islamic Communication Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, ensuring a rigorous analytical process that highlights both structure and meaning (Fairclough, 2013, p. 93; Bandura, 2002, p. 128).

Conclusion drawing involved an iterative synthesis of themes and theoretical insights. By aligning the discourse patterns with the pedagogical and theological frameworks established earlier, the study draws comprehensive inferences about the role and effectiveness of ulama in promoting zakat education through digital platforms. This process highlights not only the communicative strategies but also their broader implications for religious literacy, digital religiosity, and socio-economic ethics. The study's conclusions are thus rooted in contextualized analysis, allowing for both theoretical contribution and practical relevance to religious educators, policy-makers, and Islamic media practitioners (Halstead, 2021, p. 163).

Results and Discussion

The results of this study highlight the nuanced ways in which ulama engage digital audiences in the education and promotion of zakat. Anchored in Islamic Communication Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the findings reveal that ulama utilize a combination of traditional theological narratives and contemporary communication techniques to construct persuasive and pedagogically effective messages. These messages often integrate scriptural references, analogies from modern life, and emotional appeals, making zakat both intellectually accessible and

morally compelling (Nasr, 2023, p. 97; Fairclough, 2013, p. 108). By doing so, ulama reinforce their role as religious educators while adapting to the fluid, fast-paced environments of social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube. This reinforces earlier research that emphasized the performative and interactive nature of digital da'wah (Ismail et al., 2022).

A comparative reading with previous literature reveals both continuities and shifts in the nature of religious discourse. While earlier studies underscored the functional role of ulama in educating communities about zakat compliance (Hassan & Noor, 2021), the current analysis reveals a deeper pedagogical intent in their online communications. The use of visual storytelling, live Q&A sessions, and direct engagement through comments sections enables a dialogic educational model, allowing audiences to actively participate in their religious learning. Moreover, this research reveals that the digital environment encourages ulama to balance scholarly rigor with relatable narratives, fostering both cognitive understanding and spiritual motivation (Bandura, 2002, p. 132; Halstead, 2021, p. 168). These practices reflect a conscious effort to translate classical zakat doctrines into actionable and ethically resonant messages suitable for contemporary audiences.

Additionally, the study identifies a growing trend among ulama to incorporate socio-political themes into their zakat discourse, linking religious obligations to broader issues such as poverty, inequality, and economic justice. This marks a shift from purely theological explanations to more holistic and socially embedded interpretations of zakat (Wodak & Meyer, 2022). By invoking real-world examples—such as the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact or refugee crises—ulama contextualize zakat within the moral economy of Islam, enhancing its relevance in today's globalized context. This strategic alignment with social justice themes not only appeals to younger and socially aware audiences but also positions zakat as a tool for collective empowerment, beyond personal piety or ritual compliance (Rahman & Suhaimi, 2023).

1. *Constructing Zakat Narratives in the Digital Sphere*

The findings indicate that ulama construct zakat-related messages in their digital da'wah through a layered blend of textual, visual, and rhetorical strategies that reflect both theological fidelity and audience engagement. A common discursive pattern is the use of nash (scriptural evidence) to ground zakat obligations in the Qur'an and Hadith, which reinforces the religious legitimacy of the message (Nasr, 2023, p. 101). These references are often immediately followed by simplified explanations and practical applications, suggesting an instructional intent. This approach resonates with the Islamic Communication Theory's emphasis on ulama as both conveyors of divine knowledge and interpreters of religious law (Ali & Hatta, 2021).

One of the most frequent techniques observed is thematic storytelling, where ulama share narratives of zakat beneficiaries to illustrate its impact. These stories often invoke emotional responses by portraying real-life struggles and transformations made

possible through zakat funds. By doing so, ulama move beyond abstract legalism to human-centered messaging that encourages empathy and action. This strategy is effective in mobilizing both awareness and financial participation, consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which asserts that moral behavior is reinforced by observable positive outcomes (Bandura, 2002, p. 122). Emotional resonance thus serves as a pedagogical and motivational tool in the construction of digital zakat discourse.

Visual elements play a significant role in message construction, particularly on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Posts often feature infographics detailing zakat categories, calculations, and distribution channels, sometimes using gamified formats to engage users. Videos tend to use dramatic music and professional editing to enhance narrative impact. These multimodal techniques reflect an awareness of digital media aesthetics and are aligned with audience expectations for clarity and appeal (Ismail et al., 2022). By packaging complex theological content into digestible formats, ulama make religious education more accessible, particularly to younger, digitally-native audiences.

A notable feature of these messages is the strategic use of hashtags such as #ZakatForChange or #DakwahDigital, which function as both categorization tools and calls to action. This aligns with Critical Discourse Analysis perspectives on digital language as a means of mobilizing community and reinforcing ideological frames (Fairclough, 2013, p. 115). These hashtags often accompany messages that frame zakat not only as a personal obligation but also as a collective instrument for social justice. In doing so, ulama embed zakat discourse within broader ethical and societal narratives, amplifying its contemporary relevance (Wodak & Meyer, 2022).

Another key observation is the dialogic nature of content delivery. Many ulama actively respond to questions in comment sections or host live sessions to explain nuances in zakat jurisprudence. This interactive approach fosters a learning environment where audiences feel seen and heard, thus enhancing educational efficacy. Such engagement transforms the traditional one-way preaching model into a participatory discourse, as theorized in modern religious pedagogy (Halstead, 2021, p. 172). Moreover, it allows ulama to tailor their explanations to audience needs, thereby improving comprehension and spiritual motivation.

Some ulama also deploy comparative framing by juxtaposing Islamic zakat principles with secular notions of taxation or philanthropy. This not only highlights zakat's distinct spiritual objectives but also appeals to educated audiences seeking a rational basis for religious practice. These comparisons often emphasize zakat's role in establishing economic balance and ethical capitalism, further embedding it within discourses of economic justice (Kahf, 2021). By drawing such parallels, ulama construct a narrative that speaks to both faith and reason, effectively expanding their reach beyond conventional religious circles.

In conclusion, the construction of zakat-related messages in digital da'wah reflects a deliberate pedagogical process informed by theological rigor, digital literacy, and audience awareness. Through the integration of scriptural evidence, emotional storytelling, visual design, interactive dialogue, and ethical framing, ulama build a multifaceted discourse that educates, inspires, and mobilizes. This strategic message construction not only preserves their religious authority but also redefines their role as educators in an evolving digital religious landscape.

2. Discursive Strategies for Audience Engagement in Zakat Da'wah

To effectively engage digital audiences, ulama employ a variety of discursive strategies that reflect an astute awareness of platform dynamics, user behavior, and theological sensitivity. One foundational strategy is the personalization of religious messages. Rather than addressing followers through abstract terms, many ulama directly invoke the viewer's agency and moral responsibility, using phrases such as "Have you fulfilled your zakat this year?" or "Imagine the reward Allah has prepared for you." This rhetorical personalization aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that behavior is more likely to change when individuals feel personally implicated in the moral narrative (Bandura, 2002, p. 125).

In tandem with personalization, ulama use pedagogical scaffolding in their content delivery. Complex zakat topics, such as nisab (minimum threshold for zakat eligibility) or zakat on business income, are broken down into smaller, sequenced lessons. This methodical unpacking of content aids in cognitive retention and reflects a didactic strategy rooted in traditional ta'lim (instruction) methods, now recontextualized for digital consumption (Halstead, 2021, p. 159). Videos are often serialized, allowing users to follow a progression of learning, which not only increases retention time on the platform but also enhances educational outcomes (Ismail et al., 2022).

Aesthetic strategies also play a significant role in user engagement. Background nasheeds (Islamic songs), visual subtitles, and dynamic transitions contribute to a multimedia religious experience. These elements increase emotional and cognitive appeal while respecting Islamic boundaries on content decorum. Visuals of zakat beneficiaries—such as orphans or the elderly—are used not to exploit suffering but to illustrate the spiritual impact of zakat, thereby framing it as both a duty and a mercy. This visual-rhetorical blend is consistent with Critical Discourse Analysis perspectives, where affective appeal strengthens ideological alignment and audience mobilization (Fairclough, 2013, p. 122).

Moreover, ulama strategically embed their zakat messages within popular discourse trends to broaden reach. For instance, during global crises like COVID-19, zakat is discussed as a communal response to economic hardship. This contextual framing makes the content timely and socially relevant, increasing shareability and engagement. Similarly, religious content is often timed around significant Islamic months such as Ramadan and Muharram, when audiences are more spiritually active

and receptive (Rahman & Suhaimi, 2023). This practice reflects an advanced understanding of social media algorithms and religious sentiment cycles.

Interactive features are another central component of audience engagement. Live Q&A sessions, story polls, and comments-based discussions allow for real-time feedback and community formation. Ulama who actively respond to audience queries increase perceived accessibility and trustworthiness. This two-way engagement enhances relational pedagogy, where the learner feels directly connected to the educator, fostering deeper religious commitment (Halstead, 2021, p. 174). In effect, the digital presence of ulama becomes both instructive and pastoral.

Interestingly, some ulama also utilize humor, irony, or relatable everyday analogies to demystify complex topics. For example, a comparison might be made between avoiding taxes and neglecting zakat, using light-hearted language to highlight moral consequences. Such approaches make the content more relatable without compromising theological integrity. This rhetorical flexibility is a distinguishing feature of digital da'wah and represents a shift from traditionally formalist preaching styles to more dialogic, accessible, and affective models (Anderson, 2020; Hussain, 2023).

Ultimately, these discursive strategies collectively construct a digital ethos where ulama act not just as scholars, but as educators, influencers, and spiritual companions. Their ability to adapt communication styles to various audience segments—youth, professionals, homemakers—demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of digital pedagogy and religious outreach. This strategic hybridity is instrumental in ensuring that zakat education remains both theologically sound and culturally relevant in the digital age.

3. Influence of Digital Strategies on Zakat Understanding and Practice

The strategic discourse of ulama on social media significantly influences public understanding of zakat, particularly by reshaping how it is conceptualized and internalized within the context of digital religiosity. One notable impact is the reframing of zakat from a legalistic duty to a spiritually uplifting and socially impactful act. Digital narratives often emphasize niyyah (intention), reward, and moral consequences, leading audiences to view zakat not only as a formal obligation but as an expression of faith and solidarity (Nasr, 2023, p. 133; Rahman & Suhaimi, 2023). This discursive shift contributes to a deeper spiritual engagement and motivates voluntary rather than merely obligatory compliance.

Audience responses in the form of comments, shares, and private messages reveal a heightened awareness of zakat eligibility criteria, its categories (asnaf), and contemporary applications such as zakat on digital income and e-commerce. Such clarity was previously limited in traditional sermons or institutional brochures. By using relatable language and interactive formats, ulama demystify complex jurisprudential content, enabling lay Muslims to make informed and confident zakat decisions (Ali & Hatta, 2021). This educational empowerment reinforces Islamic Communication

Theory's assertion that effective religious communication facilitates ethical action rooted in scriptural knowledge.

Furthermore, digital engagement with zakat messages has led to increased public interest in structured giving and charitable planning. Audience testimonies often mention how exposure to ulama's digital teachings led them to consult with zakat institutions or shift from informal charity to structured zakat payments. These behavioral outcomes demonstrate a pedagogical transition from passive religious consumption to active financial ethics (Bandura, 2002, p. 129). In this sense, the digital strategies not only educate but also encourage habit formation and socio-economic accountability in accordance with Islamic principles.

The influence also extends to communal and family dynamics. Several posts analyzed reveal that discussions around zakat prompted household conversations, particularly during Ramadan, where digital sermons often became reference points for collective decision-making. This shows that digital da'wah by ulama plays a role in reviving communal religious discourse, reinforcing the idea that zakat is both an individual and collective responsibility (Halstead, 2021, p. 165). The intergenerational spread of content through platforms like WhatsApp also suggests that digital religiosity fosters horizontal and vertical transmission of zakat literacy.

Another significant observation is the increased alignment of zakat practice with social justice awareness. By framing zakat as a remedy for systemic poverty and inequality, ulama appeal to younger, socially conscious Muslims. This alignment enhances the perceived relevance of zakat in modern society and positions it as a faith-based tool for economic reform. Users often respond with references to social activism and advocacy, indicating a transformation in the conceptual space zakat occupies—from a ritual to a moral imperative with civic implications (Wodak & Meyer, 2022; Kahf, 2021).

The feedback loop between digital content and institutional action also reflects a synergistic effect. In some cases, followers reported joining zakat campaigns or volunteering for Islamic charitable organizations after being inspired by online teachings. This demonstrates the practical efficacy of digital da'wah in channeling religious learning into actionable outcomes. The consistent integration of scriptural validation, real-life impact, and digital engagement tactics allows ulama to cultivate a holistic religious consciousness that bridges knowledge and action (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003, p. 92).

In conclusion, the discursive strategies of ulama on social media do more than disseminate religious information; they actively transform public perceptions and practices of zakat. Through emotional resonance, interactive learning, and socio-theological framing, these strategies nurture an informed, spiritually motivated, and ethically grounded practice of zakat. In doing so, they affirm the continuing relevance of ulama in guiding contemporary Muslim life, while also adapting religious instruction to the norms and expectations of digital religiosity.

Core Findings and Pathways Forward

This study reveals that ulama play a transformative role in educating Muslim communities about zakat through strategically crafted digital da'wah. The research answered the first question by showing how ulama construct zakat-related messages using scriptural grounding, emotional storytelling, and multimodal elements such as visuals and hashtags.

These constructions are not mere reproductions of traditional sermons; they represent adaptive theological narratives designed for accessibility and engagement. Addressing the second question, the study found that discursive strategies such as personalization, aesthetic formatting, audience interactivity, and social relevance significantly enhanced digital engagement. These methods demonstrate pedagogical depth and a high degree of media literacy among the ulama, suggesting an evolving religious education paradigm that blends authority with approachability.

The third research question was answered through an analysis of audience behavior and responses. The data shows that digital da'wah led by ulama not only improves public understanding of zakat but also changes how zakat is practiced. Users moved from passive awareness to active financial planning, structured giving, and even community advocacy.

The research demonstrates that when framed correctly, zakat becomes a spiritual, ethical, and civic practice deeply embedded in everyday life. Theologically, the study contributes to Islamic Communication Theory by expanding it into the digital sphere and offering a model of relational, dialogic pedagogy.

Practically, the findings imply that religious institutions and educators should invest in multimedia literacy and strategic content planning to sustain the effectiveness of digital da'wah. Furthermore, the study offers a conceptual refinement by presenting an integrative framework that combines traditional Islamic pedagogy with digital discourse analysis, creating new pathways for faith-based economic education in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *ulama*, by strategically leveraging digital platforms, are playing an increasingly transformative role in reshaping both the discourse and the practical application of zakat education within contemporary Muslim societies. Far from merely transmitting religious obligations, these scholars engage in a dynamic form of digital pedagogy that fuses classical Islamic knowledge with innovative communication strategies tailored to modern audiences.

By employing a blend of theological rigor, discursive creativity, and technological proficiency, *ulama* construct compelling religious narratives that do more than

inform—they actively inspire moral reflection and behavioral change among followers. This hybrid approach allows them to bridge the epistemic gap between traditional religious authority and digitally literate Muslim youth, thus revitalizing interest in zakat as both a spiritual and civic responsibility.

The study's findings confirmed that the communicative strategies adopted by *ulama*—including personalization, storytelling, interactivity, and contextual framing—not only enhance clarity and emotional resonance but also foster deeper public engagement with the ethical foundations of zakat. These methods enable audiences to see zakat not as a detached financial duty, but as a living expression of *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and social justice. Importantly, the rise of digital religiosity does not appear to diminish the perceived authority of traditional scholars. Instead, it reconfigures their roles, positioning them as adaptive educators and moral leaders who are capable of translating timeless principles into contemporary formats that resonate with today's socio-cultural realities.

To sustain and further amplify this emerging impact, it is essential that religious educators, zakat institutions, and policymakers work collaboratively to develop structured, digitally optimized educational content that remains rooted in *turāth* (classical Islamic heritage) while addressing current ethical and socioeconomic challenges. Such efforts should be aimed not merely at increasing compliance but at cultivating a spiritually informed and socially conscious Muslim public.

Future research is encouraged to explore the long-term behavioral and attitudinal outcomes of digital zakat campaigns, particularly in relation to shifts in charitable giving patterns, civic participation, and ethical self-regulation. Moreover, investigations should extend beyond zakat to examine how other foundational pillars of Islam—such as *ṣalāh* (prayer), *ṣawm* (fasting), and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage)—are being digitally mediated to foster a more holistic and literate engagement with Islam in the digital age.

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