



Netizens' Responses to Theological Content on Social Media: A Case Study of Dondy Tan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Apologetics; Mediatization; Social Media; Theological Content.</p> <hr/> <p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 2025-11-17 Revised 2026-03-01 Accepted 2026-03-11</p>	<p>This research is motivated by the rapid development of digital communication, which has had a significant impact on social interaction patterns, including in the realm of da'wah (Islamic outreach), which is now often conducted online. One interesting figure to study is Dondy Tan, a content creator who actively uses YouTube to deliver da'wah. The content he presents not only conveys moral and religious messages but also often touches on fundamental theological issues, such as understanding divinity, interpreting holy books, and studying the history of religious development. The main focus of this research is to analyze how Dondy Tan constructs the argumentation flow in each of his da'wah content, as well as to examine how the audience, especially the netizen community, responds to and interprets the messages conveyed. This research uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. The primary data source is Dondy Tan's da'wah videos uploaded to his YouTube channel, which are then analyzed using Fairclough's discourse analysis framework. Furthermore, netizen comments in the discussion column are also studied, especially comments that generate a lot of responses, replies, and debate. The intense interaction in the comment space reflects the dynamics of digital communication and the construction of meaning for the da'wah messages conveyed.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Message delivery is a fundamental aspect of human life. A message is information or an idea conveyed from one party to another with the aim of creating understanding, influencing attitudes, or encouraging certain actions. Effective message delivery requires a combination of message content, delivery method, and media used (Purba, 2020). This is becoming increasingly important in modern society, which is filled with the rapid and diverse flow of information. Communication, as the process of conveying messages, encompasses various important elements such as the media used to send the message, the sender and recipient of the message, and the feedback between the sender and recipient (Karyaningsih, 2018). This communication process can take place one-way, such as in television broadcasts or lectures, or two-way, such as in discussions or interviews. In effective communication, the sender must be able to understand the needs, background, and preferences of the recipient so that the message delivered can be received and understood well (Karyaningsih, 2018).

Message delivery can be divided into several types based on the method or form as follows: First, verbal communication involves the use of words to convey messages, both orally and in writing. The advantage of verbal communication lies in its clarity and ability to convey messages directly. Second, nonverbal communication which Using gestures or symbols to convey messages without words. This form of communication includes body language, facial expressions, hand gestures, vocal intonation, and appearance. Nonverbal communication often complements verbal communication to emphasize or clarify the message being conveyed. Third, interpersonal communication occurs between two or more individuals interacting directly (Purba, 2020). This type of communication is often used in personal relationships, such as family, friends, or coworkers. Interpersonal communication aims to build relationships, resolve conflicts, or share information. Fourth, mass communication involves conveying messages to a wide audience through mass media such as television, radio, newspapers, and the internet. This type of communication is usually one-way, where the sender does not receive direct feedback from the audience. Fifth, digital communication is one of the dominant forms of communication. Delivering messages through social media, email, instant messaging applications, and other digital platforms allows for fast, efficient communication and can reach a global audience (Ashari et al., 2024).

Digital communication also allows for two-way interaction through comment features, direct messages, or discussion forums. Sixth, public communication involves delivering messages to large groups through speeches, presentations, or seminars. This type of communication is often used in educational, political, or religious contexts to educate, influence, or inspire audiences. Seventh, visual communication uses images, graphics, videos, or other visual elements to convey messages. This form of communication is often used in advertising media, graphic design, or social campaigns to attract attention and facilitate audience understanding (Karyaningsih, 2018). Digital communication also allows for two-way interaction through comment features, direct messages, or discussion forums. Sixth, public communication involves delivering messages to large groups through speeches, presentations, or seminars. This type of communication is often used in educational, political, or religious contexts to educate, influence, or inspire audiences. Seventh, visual communication uses images, graphics, videos, or other visual elements to convey messages. This form of communication is often used in advertising media, graphic design, or social campaigns to attract attention and facilitate audience understanding.

In addition to the types mentioned above, communication can also be differentiated based on its purpose, such as persuasive, informative, or entertainment. Persuasive communication aims to influence the audience's attitudes or behavior, informative communication focuses on conveying facts and knowledge, while entertainment communication aims to provide pleasure or recreation to the audience (Kadri, 2022). The delivery of religious messages has a more specific role, namely conveying moral values and teachings that can serve as life guidelines for individuals and society. Religious teachings, as a form of message, are often conveyed through oral traditions, writings, and social practices passed down from generation to generation. The delivery of religious messages aims to build spiritual awareness, instill good values, and strengthen the relationship between humans, God, and each other. This is called da'wah.

Da'wah is a popular activity today, with all the media available, and advanced technology making it easy for people to access information with a single click without the hassle of going directly to the source. This has significantly transformed the dissemination of information (Fakhrurroji, 2021). Of course, preaching, creating content, and conveying other messages inevitably leads to disagreements, especially on sensitive theological or religious issues. One interesting aspect of contemporary da'wah is the use of persuasive strategies to attract and influence audience behavior. Preachers are not only required to master religious knowledge but also to possess effective communication skills, understand their audience, and convey messages relevant to the current context (Sunarto, 2014). Da'wah is also packaged in an attractive way in online media, with features such as controversial or sensitive titles, short video clips, and other elements that attract attention and criticism. Persuasive rhetoric is a key factor in influencing the audience's message.

In Arabic, da'wah comes from the word da'a, which means to invite, call, or summon. Terminologically, da'wah is defined as a call to introduce and instill Islamic teachings in individuals or communities. Meanwhile, da'wah in the KBBI (Big Indonesian Dictionary) is defined as a call to practice, embrace, and study religious teachings. Da'wah plays a strategic role in maintaining the continuity of religious teachings amidst the dynamics of the ever-changing era. As part of religious propagation, da'wah aims not only to convey information but also to build spiritual, social, and intellectual awareness among religious communities (Abdullah, 2015). Over time, the da'wah approach has undergone various transformations. From traditional methods such as sermons in mosques and religious study groups, da'wah has now evolved into a phenomenon encompassing various media and strategies. Contemporary da'wah utilizes digital technology to convey religious messages to a wide audience

through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, podcasts, and other social media. This approach not only expands the reach of da'wah but also allows da'wah practitioners to present messages that are more relevant to the context of modern society.

Looking at contemporary da'wah, discourse is a crucial element used to convey religious messages (Kholili et al., 2024). Da'wah serves not only as a communication medium but also as a tool for building emotional connections with audiences. This is inseparable from persuasive communication, which plays a crucial role in attracting attention, building awareness, and influencing audience behavior to align with Islamic values. The ability of the da'wah to combine the substance of religious teachings with effective communication strategies is key to successful da'wah, especially in the digital era filled with distractions and information competition.

One interesting digital da'wah figure to study is Dondy Tan, a preacher and apologist who actively uses social media platforms, particularly YouTube. He is known for his distinctive communication style, combining humor, personal narratives, and persuasive rhetoric, enabling him to reach a diverse audience, including the younger generation, who often feel alienated from conventional da'wah models. His presence has also become increasingly well-known due to his frequent invitations to dialogue with public figures such as Denny Sumargo and Dr. Richard Lee. Dondy Tan not only conveys religious teachings but also builds discourses that touch on theological issues, particularly those related to proving Islam as God's chosen religion and interfaith debates with the Christian community. His success in reaching a wide audience is inseparable from his adaptive communication approach, namely by combining rational argumentation, references to scripture, and a persuasive style. Through his content, he builds an apologetic narrative aimed at strengthening the faith of Muslims while addressing differing theological views in the digital space. However, the discourse he constructs is not always universally accepted. Netizens' responses have varied, ranging from full support to substantive criticism to debates that have given rise to new interpretations of the preaching message. This phenomenon demonstrates that digital preaching is not only about delivering a message, but also about the dynamic interaction between the preacher and the audience.

Based on this, this study focuses on analyzing the theological content delivered by Dondy Tan, the communicative strategies used, and netizen responses in the comments section, which triggered intense interaction. Using qualitative descriptive analysis and discourse analysis, this study aims to understand how digital preaching shapes the construction of meaning, the dynamics of interpretation, and its implications for the development of religious communication in the social media era.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a focus on analyzing digital Islamic preaching content produced by Dondy Tan, a content creator, apologist, and Islamic preacher who is quite controversial in the digital space. The main subject of the study is Dondy Tan's video content discussing theological issues, while the research object is directed at the construction of theological messages and netizen responses on social media. The research type used is descriptive analytical, which allows researchers to examine in-depth communication strategies, argumentation, and the dynamics of interactions between preachers and audiences. The research involves content analysis, digital observation, interviews, and discourse analysis. Data sources are divided into primary and secondary. Primary data includes clips of Dondy Tan's YouTube videos that touch on themes of divinity and scripture, as well as netizen comments both on the official channel and on other platforms that rebroadcast the video clips. Data selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, based on the criteria of topic relevance, high levels of interaction, and the presence of discussions that indicate support, criticism, or reinterpretation of theological messages. Secondary sources include literature, journals, media articles, and other relevant documentation, including the results of interviews with Dondy Tan as supporting primary data (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data collection techniques were carried out through: (1) observation of netizen responses to the da'wah video, (2) in-depth interviews with subjects to explore delivery strategies, (3) documentation in the form of theories, books, and academic references, and (4) analysis of netizen comments with purposive sampling to suit the research focus. The comments analyzed did not only come from supporters or opponents, but also from neutral parties to see a broader spectrum of interpretations.

The data analysis process used a combination of Miles & Huberman and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. The analysis was conducted in four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, the data were sorted into two categories: Dondy Tan's preaching narrative and netizen responses. The narratives were analyzed using Toulmin's argumentation structure to examine the strength of claims and premises, while netizen comments were analyzed using response theory and Hjarvard's

perspective on religious mediatization to understand how discourse is produced, disseminated, and interpreted in digital society (Sugiyono, 2013). The analysis was then deepened using Fairclough's model, which emphasizes discursive practices. This is important for assessing how comments, discussions, and audience reactions position themselves toward the preacher, religious authorities, and ideological opponents. The sorted data were systematically displayed as an analysis map to facilitate pattern reading. The final stage involved drawing deductive and inductive conclusions, to confirm the relevance of response theory and religious mediatization to the phenomenon under study. Thus, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how Dondy Tan constructs theological messages, the argumentation strategies he employs in dealing with criticism, and how netizens respond to him through digital interactions. These findings not only enrich the study of religious communication in the digital era but also offer practical implications for preachers and preaching institutions in formulating more effective communication strategies amidst the dynamics of the virtual public sphere.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Profile of Dondy Tan

Dondy Tan is a well-known convert to Islam, a content creator, apologist, and preacher in Indonesia today. His spiritual journey has attracted widespread attention, particularly his decision to embrace Islam after a seven-year search. Previously, he was known as a Christian who actively studied his traditional teachings. Born in Melbourne of Chinese descent, his full name is Dondy Tan Susanto. His decision to convert came after a thorough study of his own holy book, which he then compared with the Quran. From this process, he concluded that the Quran is a holy book that is logical, consistent, and relevant to modern knowledge. Finally, on July 25, 2014, he recited the two sentences of the shahada, officially marking his Muslim conversion. This journey was not a short one, but rather involved extensive research that strengthened his faith. Family factors also played a role, as his mother had already embraced Islam.

Ahmed Deedat's lectures also provided significant inspiration. Dondy even directly examined the Bible to test Deedat's arguments, becoming convinced that the Bible is not the complete word of God, despite its similarities with the Qur'an, particularly in the concept of monotheism. His first experience of prostrating himself during prayer became a profoundly spiritual moment, reflecting complete submission to the Creator. Over time, Dondy Tan became increasingly active in preaching through social media. He utilizes his Instagram account @dondy.tan, which now has hundreds of thousands of followers, and his YouTube channel "Dondy Tan," which has over one million subscribers. Since 2020, he has begun creating apologetic-themed content discussing comparative religions, science, and Islamic theology. Now, he serves not only as a convert to Islam but also as a digital preacher, striving to strengthen the Muslim faith and provide enlightenment to those who are still hesitant to study Islam.

Dondy Tan's Style of Presenting Theological Content through Digital Media

The increasing prevalence of internet access across various regions has made access to digital media a part of people's daily routines. Furthermore, digital media facilitates the dissemination of messages across geographical boundaries within seconds, allowing previously local messages to reach a global audience. This development of digital media has drastically changed the way people communicate, obtain information, and interact. While mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers were once the primary sources of message dissemination, digital media has now taken over that role with a broader and more interactive reach. The emergence of various platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook allows anyone to become a content producer, not just a consumer. This transformation is driving a shift in people's media consumption patterns, increasingly shifting toward audio-visual and interactive content (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). This situation creates a new, participatory communication ecosystem, where audiences not only receive information but are also actively involved in the process of producing and distributing messages. The phenomenon of user-generated content demonstrates that the boundaries between media producers and consumers are increasingly blurred. Netizens can comment, reshare, or even create counter-content in response to an issue. This indicates a shift from one-way communication to more dynamic two-way, or even multi-way, communication. Furthermore, the algorithmic logic implemented in various platforms also influences how messages circulate and who receives them. Content with high engagement levels is more likely to gain widespread exposure, so provocative or emotional narratives often dominate over neutral content. As a result, digital media has become not only a space for sharing information but also an arena for contested discourse, including on religious, social, and political issues.

One of the most popular platforms in the online world is YouTube. This platform is one of the top five most frequently visited websites by netizens. Everything is available here, making it one of the most sought-after platforms and one of the oldest viewing platforms, having been established in 2005 (Khan, 2017). Another attractive feature is YouTube's long-form video format, which allows for narrative development, the use of textual evidence, and the presentation of logical flow. YouTube also provides a chapter feature or time markers that make it easier for viewers to navigate specific topics within a video. The integrated comment feature allows for direct interaction between content creators and their audiences, strengthening the dialogic feel. The image and sound quality on YouTube are generally higher than on other platforms, bolstering the visual and audio credibility of the content (Hu, 2021). YouTube's algorithm, which recommends similar videos to new users and also to users interested in a particular topic, increases the opportunity for content to spread organically. Both are lucrative monetization options, with YouTube providing financial incentives that can encourage the sustainability of content production. All these factors make YouTube not just a video storage platform, but also a strategic arena for public discourse for the dissemination of theological messages. The existence of a community of subscribers, or more specifically, subscribers, allows for the formation of a loyal audience that follows each new upload (Goncearenco et al., 2015). This is no exception for Dondy Tan, a content creator, apologist, and preacher, who uses this to convey his message.

Dondy Tan has a unique way of conveying his theological content. In this section, the researcher will analyze how Dondy Tan conveys his theological content style on the platform he frequently uses, namely the YouTube platform, by paying attention to video thumbnails, controversial titles, and YouTube shorts, which are video excerpts to attract the audience's attention by using the first seconds so that netizens can find out the intended video excerpt, or what is called a hook. One important element in Dondy Tan's presentation style is his ability to package content visually and verbally to attract the audience's attention even before the video starts, often using strategic clickbait from thumbnails to give the impression of excitement or major conflict (Einsle et al., 2023). Three aspects that stand out in this regard are the thumbnail design, the choice of provocative titles, and the use of short video excerpts or hooks in the first seconds of the broadcast. All three serve not only to sweeten the appearance but also as a communication strategy that strengthens the appeal of the theological message conveyed (Rahayu et al., 2024). The use of thumbnails, provocative titles, and hooks isn't just visual embellishment, but rather a strategy designed to maximize audience engagement. This style aligns with the YouTube platform's focus on click-through rates as a measure of content performance. However, in this case, researchers will focus solely on thumbnails and titles, as hooks are quite difficult to implement in this study.

An analysis of the thumbnail and title of the first video, "Egret Debate!: Dondy Tan vs. Pastor Heno Kwok – In the Name of Jesus!!!" reveals a powerful visual strategy. The thumbnail utilizes a dominant bright yellow color combined with green, red, blue, and white text. This contrasting combination creates an energetic impression and captures the audience's attention from the outset. The two characters are also positioned opposite each other: Dondy Tan appears relaxed with his smile and hat, while Pastor Heno Kwok is depicted assertively with his red shirt and pointing gesture. This contrast in expression creates a confrontational impression that directs the audience's perception of the "battle of ideas" narrative even before they press play. Meanwhile, the titles displayed in the thumbnails, such as "Egret Debate!" and "In the Name of Jesus!!!", deliberately use capital letters, repeated exclamation points, and provocative diction. The word "egret," rarely used in formal contexts, adds an element of surprise and arouses curiosity (Aristotle, 2007). Meanwhile, the phrase "In the Name of Jesus!!!" in bold red emphasizes the sensitive topic of Jesus' divinity. This element operates through a pathos strategy, arousing the audience's emotions from the outset. Credibility and appeal are reinforced by the inclusion of the figure "1M Views" as a form of social proof, and the nearly three-hour duration, which gives the impression of a serious discussion. This verbal and visual combination effectively frames the video as an arena for major theological debate, enhancing Dondy Tan's authority and attracting a surge in audiences (Cialdini, 2009). However, this framing strategy also has certain consequences. On the one hand, strong visual and verbal appeal can expand the audience's reach, even beyond communities directly interested in theological issues. On the other hand, an overemphasis on the emotional aspect has the potential to lead to polarization of opinion, as audiences are more easily drawn to provocative symbols than to the substance of the argument. Thus, the success of this content is determined not only by the quality of the debate material, but also by the ability to build public perception through the symbols, colors, and popularity markers inherent in the logic of digital media.

The second video thumbnail demonstrates a visual strategy that emphasizes the differences between the two sides by dividing the screen into two sides. The left side, with its orange background, depicts three pastors sitting in discussion, representing religious tradition and authority. In contrast, the right side, with its blue background, features Dondy Tan smiling and holding a Bible, presenting an image of confidence and readiness

to argue. This color contrast creates a visual framing that makes it easier for viewers to distinguish between the two sides' positions. The text "1.1M VIEWS" placed in the center serves as social proof, reinforcing the legitimacy of the video's popularity (Poudel et al., 2026).

The title "3 Pastors vs. Dondy Tan" uses a confrontational formula that immediately builds expectations of an intense debate. The use of the number "3" emphasizes the numerical disparity, thereby arousing sympathy for Dondy as the minority. The subtitle "Assumptions vs. Data" further emphasizes the intellectual framing, positioning Dondy as the rational, data-driven side, while his opponent is anchored in assumptions. This technique combines the appeal of logos and pathos, encouraging the audience to view Dondy's argument as both more logical and more emotional. Rhetorically, the visual elements and the title combine ethos (Dondy's credible image), logos (evidence-based claims), and pathos (emotional appeal). As a result, Dondy is positioned not only as a theological content creator but also as an intellectual figure who dares to confront religious authority in the digital space (Dong, 2024).

The third content thumbnail features two main characters: Dondy Tan on the left and a man introduced as a former GBI pastor on the right, both shaking hands in a dramatic frame. The dark red background with a bokeh effect emphasizes the emotional intensity while keeping the focus on the main figure. Similar to the previous video, the text "2.6M Views" is prominently placed at the bottom, serving as social proof that reinforces the legitimacy of the popularity. The dominant red color conveys a sense of urgency and curiosity, while the Graha Apologetika logo in the top corner serves as a consistent element of the channel's identity. The title "Former GBI Pastor... Asyhadu..." is designed to be provocative. The mention of "Former GBI Pastor" attracts the attention of audiences familiar with the denomination because it implies a significant change in belief. The interrupted phrase "Asyhadu..." serves as a cliffhanger, creating a curiosity gap that compels viewers to click to find out more. This strategy combines ethos in the form of the source's credibility, pathos through the symbolic handshake and the color red, and logos in the form of a logical narrative behind the conversion process. Furthermore, the handshake gesture conveys a message of peace that reduces potential resistance from an audience of various faiths. The length (over an hour) gives the impression of an in-depth interview, while the millions of views emphasize its importance. Overall, the visuals and title position the video as a major moment with strong spiritual and emotional appeal (Loewenstein, 2007).

The fourth content thumbnail features a bright blue background with a combination of white and red text, creating a strong contrast and immediately capturing the audience's attention. The main character, a woman named Kezia, is shown on the right side with a broad smile and clear lighting, making her face appear friendly and easily recognizable. In the upper left corner, the text "2.1M Views" serves as social proof, reinforcing the video's popularity, as did the previous content. The choice of blue creates a calm and neutral feel, but is immediately offset by the red text "So, let's be Muslim!", which creates emotional pressure while adding appeal. This visual combination creates a friendly yet provocative impression. The title "Want to follow Jesus? So, let's be Muslim!" is designed to leverage shock value and contrasting meanings. The combination of two distinct theological claims arouses curiosity and the potential for controversy, reinforced by the exclamation mark, which adds a sense of urgency. The use of the source's name, "Kezia," emphasizes the personal nature of the story, which typically increases engagement because it touches the audience's emotional side. This strategy combines ethos, provided by the source's friendly appearance, with pathos, provided by the provocative title, which alludes to important symbols of other religions. Thus, this video is positioned not only as a personal testimony, but also as an apologetic discussion space that is in accordance with Dondy Tan's branding pattern on his digital channel (Loewenstein, 2007).

Rhetorical and Argumentative Strategies Used by Dondy Tan in Discussing and Debating with Christian Apologetics and Missionaries

In debating with Christian apologists and missionaries, Dondy Tan frequently utilizes rhetorical strategies and argumentative techniques to strengthen his position while weakening his opponents' claims. His rhetoric can be seen through Aristotle's framework of ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos is evident in his mastery of references, both to the Bible in various versions and to authoritative sources such as the KBBI dictionary. Pathos is evident through the use of humor, lighthearted satire, and a relaxed style of language, so that the debate atmosphere remains fluid despite the sensitive topic. However, Dondy's main strength lies in logos, namely argumentation based on linguistic analysis, translation comparisons, and logical reasoning. He often asks repeated questions to test the consistency of definitions, force clarification, and highlight potential logical fallacies of his opponents, such as equivocation or circular reasoning. This technique gives the impression that his opponents' arguments are easily refuted, thereby increasing their persuasiveness in the eyes of the audience. The emphasis on terms such as "God," "Allah," "Theos," and "Kurios" demonstrates systematic, analytical thinking. This research analysis utilizes three YouTube debate

transcripts, selected because they represent a variety of contexts and opponents, while also demonstrating recurring patterns. This approach allows researchers to map the consistent use of ethos, pathos, and logos and examine Dondy Tan's logical structure through Toulmin's argumentation model (Arifin et al., 2023).

The debate began with Luke 24:46, which states, "Thus it is written: The Messiah must suffer and rise again on the third day." Dondy highlighted the word *gegraptai* (written) as a crucial point. For him, this statement demanded explicit textual evidence in the Tanakh, not symbolic interpretation. He challenged Pastor Heno to show verses that stated this literally, but Heno responded with typological hermeneutics, such as Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant and the story of Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish. For Dondy, this did not meet the standard of literal citation. He used the strategy of argument from absence with logic: "If there is, show it. If there is not, the written claim is questionable." The issue escalated when Heno used Jonah as a pattern for resurrection prophecy. Dondy emphasized two objections: first, the Friday-Sunday period is not a full 72 hours, so it does not fit with "three days and three nights." Second, the story of Jonah is a narrative of repentance, not an explicit messianic prophecy. According to him, using literal calculations, the Jonah analogy fails; If using ancient Jewish idioms, then it falls into the realm of interpretation, not literal evidence. The debate then shifted to the question of method: whether the standard reading should be literal-factual or idiomatic-typological (Finnegan, 1964). Heno then proposed inclusive reckoning, a Jewish method that counts parts of a day as a whole day. With this pattern, Friday afternoon–Sunday morning could be considered three days. For Heno, this is in accordance with the original tradition. However, Dondy emphasized that the use of idiomatic methods must be recognized as interpretation, not literal evidence. Thus, inclusive reckoning cannot be used simultaneously as "written" evidence and still be considered literal.

This strategy demonstrates Dondy's consistency in his adherence to strict literalism. The debate continues with Isaiah 53. Heno interprets it as a messianic prophecy of Jesus' suffering and restoration. However, Dondy views the text as referring more to Israel as a collective servant, given the context of chapters 52–54. He emphasizes that there is no explicit mention of a resurrection on the third day. Here, Dondy again distinguishes the Christian typological interpretation from the literal-historical meaning of the text, while also pointing out that Jewish interpretation itself disagrees with making it a messianic prophecy. The discussion moves to the issue of authorship of the Gospels. Dondy highlights that the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were only attributed through early church tradition (Papias, Irenaeus), not through original internal evidence. This, he argues, indicates that the Gospels' authority relies on tradition, rather than textual evidence. Heno accepts this, but affirms tradition as part of the authority of faith. The epistemic difference is clear: Dondy demands literal-historical verification, while Heno relies on the legitimacy of church tradition. The final issue concerns the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19. Dondy believes the formula "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is a later development, since in the Acts of the Apostles baptism is always administered "In the Name of Jesus." He cites Eusebius, who wrote a different version (In My Name), and cites academic literature supporting the theory of liturgical development. Heno counters this by calling the Acts account a narrative, not a liturgical formula, and defending the authority of tradition. Overall, Dondy's argumentation is consistent: he demands literal and historical standards, emphasizes logical consistency, and avoids typology or tradition as valid evidence. In contrast, Heno relies on typological hermeneutics, inclusive reckoning, a Christological interpretation of Isaiah, and the authority of church tradition. The battle is not simply over a specific verse, but rather a fundamental difference in epistemological framework: literal text versus traditional interpretation.

In his discussion of Philippians 2:6–7, Dondy emphasizes that the term *morphe theou* is better understood as a functional form or state, rather than a divine essence. This view differs from Christian interpretations, which see it as evidence of Jesus' pre-existence. This distinction demonstrates the methodological contrast between the lexical-literal approach and systematic interpretations that rely on a canonical framework. Concerning Bible translation, Dondy criticizes the inconsistent use of the terms "Allah" and "Tuhan" in Indonesian. He believes that the equating of the terms YHWH, Elohim, and Kyrios creates a bias that favors Jesus' claim to divinity. As a comparison, he shows how the English Bible distinguishes between LORD, God, and Lord. This criticism is directed at the authority of the translation agency and its impact on the formation of dogma. The debate over John 10:33–36 also presents different perspectives. Christians emphasize the Jewish accusation that Jesus blasphemed as evidence for his claim to divinity, while Dondy interprets Jesus' response, quoting Psalm 82, as an attempt to relativize the title. For him, the term "Son of God" is metaphorical-honorific, not an ontological statement. Another issue arises from the act of worship or prostrating oneself to Jesus mentioned in the New Testament. Christians view this as evidence of divine worship, while

Dondy points out that the Greek term *proskuneo* is also used to express respect for kings, prophets, or angels. Therefore, he considers it a semantic error to equate all acts of prostration with exclusive worship of God. The practice of prayer is also a matter of debate. Dondy points out that the prayers taught by Jesus are always addressed to the Father, and the apostles pray to God by invoking Jesus' name, not directly to Jesus. This is considered to demonstrate a subordinating relationship, although there are some situational exceptions in the text. The discussion of John 1:1 highlights grammatical aspects. Dondy explains that the phrase *kai theos en ho logos* should be understood qualitatively, so it is more accurately translated as "the Word is divine" rather than "the Word was God." Christians interpret it ontologically, but Dondy believes that this interpretation is influenced by Greek philosophy and early church councils. Christians view Jesus' resurrection as proof of divinity. However, Dondy emphasizes that all sources for these claims come from internal documents without external verification, so they are more appropriately understood as community beliefs rather than historical facts.

The debate also touched on the issue of biblical authority and church interpretation. Dondy believes that the canonization of scripture is the result of historical selection by humans, so doctrines like the Trinity are more accurately viewed as products of institutional tradition rather than explicit revelation. He also emphasizes the differences in canons across Christian denominations as evidence of the heterogeneity of claims to authority. Dondy's approach consistently relies on lexical, historical, and contextual analysis to reject the understanding of Jesus' divinity. Conversely, Christians prioritize canonical interpretation and the authority of church tradition as the basis for theological reading. Thus, the main point of conflict lies in the epistemological frameworks used by both sides. For Dondy, texts must be interpreted literally and historically according to the context of their language and the history of their writing, while Christians emphasize the importance of theological-traditional understanding passed down through church authority.

Argumentative Structures in the Video "3 Pastors vs. Dondy Tan"

The debate in the video "3 Pastors vs. Dondy Tan" demonstrates the dynamics of interpreting New Testament (NT) texts regarding Jesus' relationship with God. At the beginning of the discussion, the pastor asserted that the confession "Jesus is Lord" in 1 Corinthians 12:3 is identical to the confession that Jesus is God. Dondy rebutted by emphasizing semantic differences. According to him, the term *kyrios* in Greek does not always mean God, but can also mean lord or ruler. Therefore, the confession "Jesus is Lord" is more accurately interpreted as an acceptance of authority granted by God the Father, not an essential identity with Him. He emphasized that the NT consistently shows Jesus submitting to and praying to the Father, so an ontological reading is deemed to go beyond the intent of the text. The debate continued with John 1:1, which is often cited as the basis for Jesus' divinity. The pastor interpreted the phrase "the Word was God" as evidence of equality. However, Dondy highlighted the grammatical aspect, noting that *theos* in the Greek text appears without an article (anarthrous). For Dondy, this form indicates a qualitative nature, so it is more accurately understood as "the Word is divine," rather than completely identical with God the Father. He emphasized the importance of prioritizing linguistic analysis before drawing dogmatic conclusions.

Dondy touched on 1 John 5:7, which in some versions of the Bible refers to "the three who become one." He pointed out that this variant is not found in early manuscripts and is generally considered an insertion. Therefore, he believes this verse is not worthy of being the primary basis for doctrine. This criticism emphasizes the need for caution in using texts whose authenticity is disputed. Romans 9:5 was also discussed. The pastor quoted it to assert that Christ is the God worthy of praise. Dondy responded by pointing out that the punctuation in the ancient Greek manuscripts differs from modern translations. The position of the comma or period can change the direction of interpretation: whether "God worthy of praise" refers to Christ or is a doxology to God separately. Because of this ambiguity, he argued that the verse cannot be used as definitive proof of Jesus' divinity. The next topic concerned the use of the title *Kyrios* and the act of prostrating oneself to Jesus. The pastor considered this evidence of divine worship. However, Dondy explained that both *kyrios* and *proskuneo* are polysemic and are often used for humans, kings, or authoritative figures. According to him, the act of reverence for Jesus does not automatically mean ontological worship of God.

In a discussion of prayer practices, the pastor pointed to Stephen's prayer addressed to Jesus as normative evidence. Dondy rejected this generalization and emphasized that the pattern of prayer taught by Jesus himself and the general practice in the New Testament is always directed to the Father through Jesus, not directly to Jesus. He considered Stephen's example a special situation, not a liturgical norm. The debate touched on the authority of the Bible and the church's interpretation. The pastor argued that the church has the authority to establish the canon and interpretation. Dondy emphasized that primary authority remains with the text, not with

tradition or institutions. For him, the church only recognizes books that are already authoritative, not creates that authority. Thus, doctrine must be tested by the Bible itself, not the other way around. Overall, Dondy's strategy centers on linguistic analysis, textual criticism, and semantic consistency. He avoids leaping from functional terms to ontological claims and rejects the use of variants or punctuation as absolute foundations. His approach emphasizes a fundamental methodological difference: reading the text based on linguistic and historical data, not solely theological tradition.

Strategic Similarities in the Three Debates

An analysis of the argumentative structure in the video "3 Pastors vs. Dondy Tan" highlights the debate over the interpretation of New Testament (NT) texts concerning Jesus' relationship with God. Early in the discussion, the pastor asserted that the statement "Jesus is Lord" in 1 Corinthians 12:3 is synonymous with the confession that Jesus is God. Dondy rebutted by emphasizing semantic differences. He explained that the Greek term *kyrios* does not always mean God, but also "lord" or "ruler." Therefore, the confession is more accurately understood as an acceptance of Jesus' authority derived from the Father, rather than an essential equality. He asserted that the NT consistently depicts Jesus submitting to and praying to the Father, thus deeming an ontological interpretation excessive (Rigotti, 2011). The debate continued with John 1:1, which the pastor understood as the basis for Jesus' divinity. Dondy highlighted that the word *theos* in the Greek text appears without an article (*anarthrous*). According to him, this form indicates a more qualitative nature, so the phrase "the Word was God" should be understood as "the Word was divine." He also alluded to 1 John 5:7, which according to textual research is an insertion and cannot be used as a basis for doctrine. Romans 9:5 is also debated, because differences in punctuation in ancient manuscripts open up room for multiple interpretations (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2005). On the issue of prayer, Dondy rejects the use of Stephen's prayer as a norm, because the primary pattern of prayer in the New Testament is always addressed to the Father through Jesus. He emphasizes that primary authority lies in the text, not the church or tradition. Overall, Dondy's strategy emphasizes linguistic analysis, textual criticism, and semantic consistency, thus demonstrating a methodology different from traditional theological interpretation.

Comprehensive Similarities and Differences of Dondy Tan's Argumentation Strategy

In the three public debates analyzed, Dondy Tan's argumentative style is both consistent and adaptive to his interlocutors. Generally, the common strategy lies in the dominance of *logos*-based arguments, namely semantic and historical analysis, and question-and-answer rhetoric combined with limiting the context of the discussion. However, differences also emerge, particularly in the intensity of the use of certain strategies, the rhetorical style chosen, and the response to the characteristics of his opponents. Thus, Dondy's argumentative style can be understood as a combination of principled consistency and tactical flexibility.

One of the most striking similarities is Dondy's tendency to begin and develop arguments through semantic-lexical analysis of New Testament texts. He repeatedly highlights Greek words such as *morphe theou*, *kyrios*, *proskuneo*, and the title "Son of God." Each term is explained based on its original meaning, its various uses, and its implications in doctrine. This approach emphasizes the dominance of *logos*, as he presents himself as a debater based on text, not emotion. Furthermore, the use of Greek terms lends intellectual weight to his arguments, establishing his ethos as someone familiar with academic literature. Another similarity is seen in the application of a historical-contextual framework. Dondy consistently links theological terms to first-century Jewish understanding. For example, he explains that the title "Son of God" does not necessarily mean divine but can refer to a king or a pious person. With this strategy, he strengthens his semantic arguments and adds historical legitimacy. This pattern is consistent across all debates, reinforcing the impression that he is not simply rejecting mainstream Christian doctrine but also offering an alternative interpretation based on historical research. Another tactic he uses is counter-questioning rhetoric. Rather than simply answering, Dondy often asks questions that force his opponents to account for their logic, such as: "If Jesus is God, why did he say the Father is greater than I?" or "Why doesn't the term *Kyrios* always refer to YHWH?" This technique not only protects his position but also pressures his opponents to expand on the evidence. Dialectically, this is a form of strategic maneuvering because it shifts the burden of proof while keeping the debate focused on the linguistic realm. Another similarity is the consistency in limiting the context of the discussion. When opponents try to bring arguments to the realm of spiritual experience or personal testimony, Dondy quickly returns them to normative texts. For him, the Bible is an authoritative reference, while experience is subjective. Thus, he limits the discussion to domains that can be tested logically and empirically. This argumentative framing technique is very advantageous for him, as it keeps the debate away from metaphysical issues that are difficult to verify. The most dominant similarity is the emphasis on appeals to *logos*. Almost all of Dondy's strategies are built

on linguistic, historical, and logical data. He rarely uses emotional narratives or pathos-oriented rhetoric. While his opponents often emphasize church authority, tradition, or faith experience, Dondy emerges as a rationalist debater. This allows him to relatively avoid fallacies, while his opponents often fall into the trap of argumentum ad auctoritatem or argumentum ad populum. This consistency demonstrates the general pattern of Dondy's argumentative style: text-based, historical, and rational.

Despite the dominant similarities, there are significant differences in the strategies used, depending on the debate opponent. The first difference lies in the intensity of the use of lexical analysis. In the debate with Pastor Ezra, semantic analysis was very detailed, as Ezra also possessed a high academic capacity. The debate took place at a technical linguistic level, resulting in a discussion denser with data and Greek terms. In contrast, when facing Pastor Heno, Dondy emphasized rhetorical and contextual aspects because his opponent often used an emotional style. This meant that Dondy adjusted the depth of his analysis to suit his opponent's profile. The next difference is the rhetorical style chosen. In the debate against Ezra, Dondy appeared calmer and more dialogical, attempting to create the impression of an academic discussion. However, when facing Pastor Heno, who used harsh intonation and emotional gestures, Dondy often used counter-questions to dampen the dominance of his opponent's pathos. Meanwhile, when facing three pastors simultaneously, he displayed a more defensive yet systematic argumentative style, with the primary strategy being to maintain focus so as not to be distracted by numerous attacks. Differences also emerged in the use of ethos. When facing Ezra, Dondy emphasized intellectual authority, appearing as someone who mastered the text and context. However, in the debate against Heno, he tended to build ethos through calm demeanor and consistent arguments, contrasting with his opponent's emotional expressions. In the debate with the three pastors, ethos was built through managerial skills: managing the flow of the discussion and avoiding the trap of mass argumentation.

Furthermore, there is variation in the application of context-limiting strategies. In the debate with Ezra, the strategy of limiting involves narrowing the meaning of certain terms based on linguistic data. However, in the debate with Heno, the strategy of limiting involves rejecting spiritual experience as the basis for arguments. In the debate with the three pastors, the strategy of limiting is evident in Dondy's efforts to keep the discussion focused on the main issue despite numerous interruptions and branching arguments. A final difference lies in his response to audience emotions. In the debate with Ezra, the audience was relatively academic, so Dondy focused on data. With Heno, the audience was emotionally charged, so Dondy balanced this with calm logic. In the debate with the three pastors, the audience tended to be polarized, so he attempted to maintain logos while avoiding provocation. These differences demonstrate that, despite the similar strategic basis, Dondy is flexible in adapting his tactics to the social and psychological context of the debate.

This combination of similarities and differences demonstrates Dondy Tan's argumentative strategy as being both consistent and adaptive. He is consistent because he always prioritizes logos through semantic analysis, historical context, counter-questioning, and limiting the discussion space. However, he is also adaptive because he changes the depth of analysis, rhetorical style, and ethos-building methods according to the character of his debating opponent. Theoretically, this aligns with the concept of pragma-dialectics, which emphasizes the need to maintain the rules of critical discussion while acknowledging the rhetorical aspect. Dondy successfully maintains a balance between the dialectical dimension (logical accuracy) and the rhetorical dimension (persuasive strategies appropriate to the context). This pattern also aligns with Van Eemeren's strategic maneuvering framework, where arguments aim not only to achieve logical truth but also to win the audience's approval. Thus, it can be concluded that Dondy Tan's argumentative style is built on a strong foundation of logos, with consistent strategies in every debate, while still allowing for tactical variations according to the context of the opponent and audience. Similarities ensure the stability of his thought patterns, while differences demonstrate his intelligence in reading situations. The combination of the two makes Dondy a rationalist debater who is not only consistent in principle, but also skilled in strategic maneuvers.

Netizens' Responses in the Comments Column to the Theological Content Delivered by Dondy Tan

This study focuses on the analysis of 20 YouTube comments responding to Dondy Tan's theological discussions and statements. Comments were selected through purposive sampling with specific criteria: they were relevant to the theological issues discussed by Dondy, related to the topic of divinity, scripture, and Christology, and generated significant interactions such as replies or likes. Irrelevant comments, such as spam or emoticons, were ignored. Data was collected not only from Dondy's official channel but also from other channels that rebroadcast excerpts of the debate to obtain a more representative variety of opinions. This aligns with Herring's view on the importance of considering the context of interactions in online discourse analysis (Herring,

2007). The results show strong polarization in three broad categories: pro, con, and neutral. Pro comments were divided into two categories: positive and negative. Pro-positive comments emphasized intellectual and religious support, including prayers for Dondy's consistent preaching and appreciation for civilized debate. Conversely, pro-negative comments contained emotional support but were accompanied by intolerant remarks, religious stereotypes, and ethnic insults. Counter-comments are also divided into two categories: positive counter-comments, which are rational, using theological arguments or loving prayers, and negative counter-comments, which tend to be ad hominem, full of insults, ridicule, and hate speech. Meanwhile, neutral comments focus on the quality of the debate, calls for tolerance, or proposals for new topics without taking sides.

This phenomenon reflects the process of mediatization of religion, whereby the message of da'wah is not only published but also reconstructed by media logic. Mediatization enables audiences to become not merely recipients but also producers of meaning through interactions in the comments section. Pro-positive support demonstrates the internalization of da'wah, while positive opposition demonstrates a more constructive space for interfaith apologetics. However, negative comments, from both the pro and con sides, demonstrate how media logic, which emphasizes provocation and emotion, dominates rational dialogue. Thus, the digital interaction surrounding Dondy Tan's content emphasizes that the comment section is not merely a discussion forum but an arena for contestation of religious identity. The mediatization of religion, in this case, not only mediates da'wah messages but also transforms authority, interpretation, and interfaith relations. Social media plays a dual role: a means of da'wah and an arena for identity conflict, where algorithms amplify the potential for polarization through provocative comments. This phenomenon demonstrates that the success of apologetics in the digital age is largely determined by media dynamics and audience response, not simply the content of the theological message conveyed.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that netizens' responses to theological content produced by Dondy Tan on social media, particularly YouTube, demonstrate a complex interaction dynamic. Netizens are no longer merely passive recipients of messages, but are actively involved in constructing arguments, offering alternative interpretations, and presenting new discourse through the comments section. The diversity of responses, including full support, strong rejection, and neutrality, reflects an intense process of mediation of meaning. This finding aligns with the theory of the mediatization of religion, which asserts that digital media functions not only as a means of communication but also as an agent that actively shapes and modifies religious discourse. Dondy Tan's communication strategy, based on a critical-textual approach, the use of biblical references, and persuasive delivery, are crucial factors in triggering intense discussion among audiences. However, this discourse cannot be separated from the logic of social media itself. Algorithms, content visualization, and engagement demands influence the direction of the conversation, often pushing it toward simplification, provocation, and popularity. Thus, the resulting interactions are not merely related to theological debates, but also demonstrate how religious messages are shaped, produced, disseminated, and reinterpreted within the digital media ecosystem. This phenomenon underscores that digital da'wah is a practice that demands adaptation to media logic. Social media not only facilitates the dissemination of religious messages but also significantly influences how audiences understand and respond to those messages. Ultimately, these interactions signal a theological transformation in the contemporary public sphere, where religious authority and meaning are renegotiated through digital mechanisms.

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