

## Preaching In Marginal Spaces: Audience Reception Of Gus Miftah's Da'wah Through Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding Approach

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### ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of preaching in non-conventional spaces such as nightclubs has drawn attention because it presents a form of religious message delivery that adapts to the socio-cultural context of marginalized audiences. Gus Miftah, as a contemporary preacher, utilizes these spaces, both directly and through digital media, to convey inclusive and communicative preaching. This study aims to analyze the process of encoding da'wah messages by Gus Miftah in the video "LC Karaoke Bertanya, Gus Miftah Ngaji di Boshe" and the audience's reception (decoding) through comments on YouTube. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory, data were collected through video documentation and purposive observation of comments. The results show that the da'wah messages are constructed contextually and humanistically, with a relaxed, humorous style and language familiar to nightlife workers. The analysis reveals three audience reception positions: the majority fully accept the message, a small portion critically engages with the context, and others reject the preaching method as incompatible with traditional values. These findings indicate that the audience's cultural, social, and religious backgrounds strongly influence the response to da'wah. This study enriches the discourse on digital da'wah and emphasizes the importance of understanding the audience as active subjects in communication. Conclusion: A contextual preaching approach effectively penetrates non-conventional spaces and is widely accepted, despite resistance from conservative and critical audiences.*

### Keywords:

*Da'wah, Digital, Gus Miftah, YouTube, Encoding, Decoding*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Islam, as a universal religion, brings mercy to all creation and is readily accepted by diverse groups, making *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) essential for spreading its teachings for the sake of happiness in this world and the hereafter ('Aziz, 2019; Sukardi, 2014). *Da'wah* approaches vary, including indirect preaching that integrates social values in the post-9/11 era (David, 2023) and the use of digital platforms that broaden reach but pose the risk of spreading extremism (Sikumbang et al., 2024). A *wasatiyyah* (moderate) approach and emotional and spiritual intelligence are necessary to prevent extremism and effectively convey messages (Abdullah, 2017; Hasbula et al., 2019). In Indonesia, *da'wah* focuses on issues such as religious defamation, peace, and social harmony through education and interfaith dialogue (Haq & Isa, 2024), while facing challenges from Salafi practices and Christian influences (Jakfar et al., 2023; Hamid et al., 2023). Al-Ghazālī emphasized moral reform and the role of scholars in *da'wah* (Azwar et al., 2024).

Digital *da'wah* in Islam has evolved through popular Islamic animated content on Instagram and YouTube, including themes like "Preachers in Animation" and "Stories of the Prophets" (Hamzah et al., 2023). Celebrity preachers such as Aa Gym and Das'ad Latif have utilized digital platforms to reach urban millennials and elites (Raya, 2024; Raya, 2025). Millennials prefer YouTube content focused on Islamic ethics and *fiqh* over *tasawwuf* (Sufism) and politics (Aditoni & Rohmah, 2022; Hasanah et al., 2024). However, the commodification of *da'wah* may prioritize entertainment over substance (Nurliah & Juwita, 2023). The innovative "smart mashup *da'wah*" approach leverages online media and the Internet of Things (IoT) to overcome spatial and temporal limitations (Qolban et al., 2024). Digital *da'wah* strengthens the "cyber ummah" community and supports Muslim organizational PR in humanitarian aid, for example, during the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Ibrahim, 2024; Slyusar et al., 2024).

A compelling phenomenon in contemporary *da'wah* is the presence of Gus Miftah, a preacher from Yogyakarta who dares to preach in nightlife venues such as cafés, prisons, bars, and nightclubs. One of his viral contents is titled "LC Karaoke Asks, Gus Miftah Preaches at Boshe," uploaded to the *Gus Miftah Official* YouTube channel on June 22, 2023. As of May 25, 2025, the 28-minute video has been viewed 1.5 million times, with 13,000 likes and 1,701 comments. In the video, Gus Miftah delivers his sermon through casual conversations with *lady companions* (LC) at a nightlife venue, embedding religious values using simple language. This approach stands out as it takes place outside of traditional religious settings, generating a range of public responses, both praise and criticism. Using a communicative and socio-cultural preaching style, Gus Miftah perceives nightlife workers as brothers and sisters equally deserving of Allah's mercy and guidance (Kosmawijaya, 2019).

This study explores the meaning of Gus Miftah's *da'wah* at Boshe through Stuart Hall's *encoding-decoding* reception analysis, which views audiences as active producers of meaning rather than mere media consumers (Agistian Fathurizki, 2018). Stuart Hall's model asserts that audiences actively interpret media messages, potentially in ways that differ from the intentions of the media producer (Fornäs, 2024). The *encoding* process involves how producers embed specific meanings in messages (Huang et al., 2021), while *decoding* refers to how audiences interpret those messages. Hall identifies three decoding positions: dominant-

hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional (Hall, 2024; Joseph, 2022). This model is pivotal in audience studies and media reception (Ferreira, 2023), reinforced through semiotic theory (Tomaselli, 2016), and remains relevant for analyzing digital media such as social media and internet memes (Nowak, 2016; Li et al., 2023).

This research aims to understand the communication process of Gus Miftah's *da'wah* (encoding) in his sermon at Boshe, as well as how the audience receives (decodes) it through his YouTube channel. The impact of this study includes expanding the discourse on contemporary Islamic *da'wah*, particularly in the context of digital media and diverse audiences. Furthermore, the study offers strategic insights for preachers in designing inclusive preaching methods. Findings reveal that audiences interpret the *da'wah* message in diverse ways. For example, some fully accept it (dominant position), others adapt it to their values (negotiated position), and some reject it (oppositional position). These findings highlight the importance of understanding the variety of responses in modern *da'wah* communication.

## B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the communication of Gus Miftah's *da'wah* in a marginalized space, Boshe, through YouTube. The focus is to analyze the *encoding process* of the *da'wah* message and the *decoding* by the marginalized audience using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory. The research object is the video of Gus Miftah's *da'wah* titled "LC Karaoke Asks, Gus Miftah Preaches at Boshe" on YouTube, located in Boshe's marginal space, an unconventional nightclub. This video enables the analysis of the dynamics of *da'wah* communication and audience responses in a diverse and different space. Purposive sampling techniques are used to select comments relevant to the *da'wah* theme, encompassing various decoding positions and levels of audience interaction. These criteria ensure that the data represent different perspectives of active audiences, allowing the analysis to depict a variety of responses in the comment section of the *da'wah* video. Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion. Comments are coded based on Stuart Hall's decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional, to understand the diverse meanings of the *da'wah* message according to the audience's socio-cultural backgrounds. The study ensures data validity through triangulation by comparing the analysis of comments with *da'wah* literature and communication theory. Repeated verification is conducted to avoid bias. The Miles and Huberman model maintains data consistency, while audience anonymity is preserved by focusing on the comments' content rather than the commenters' identity.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Data Analysis of Gus Miftah's Da'wah Using Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding Model

To understand how the communication process of Gus Miftah's *da'wah* unfolds, is received, and interpreted by media audiences, the researcher employs Stuart Hall's communication model, which divides the communication process into two main stages:

#### a. The Encoding Process of the Da'wah Message by Gus Miftah

In Stuart Hall's communication model, the encoding process refers to how a message is constructed and coded by the communicator within specific social, cultural,



and ideological frameworks. In this context, Gus Miftah constructs his *da'wah* message with a contextual, humanistic, and socio-cultural approach, adapting the preaching material to the background of an audience from the nightlife world. His *da'wah* message is delivered through a video titled "LC Karaoke Asks, Gus Miftah Preaches at Boshe," uploaded on the *Gus Miftah Official* YouTube channel on June 22, 2023. Gus Miftah's encoding strategy is evident in three primary forms:

- 1) Inclusivity: Gus Miftah explicitly states that *da'wah* should not only be limited to mosques or sacred spaces. He affirms that nightlife venues can also be fields of good deeds for preachers willing to reach them. Statements like "the mosque is not the only place for *da'wah*" reflect the encoding of an inclusive Islamic value that embraces all social groups.
- 2) Empathy and Anti-Judgmental Attitude: When responding to audience questions, Gus Miftah avoids judgment. He conveys that "a person's life path cannot be judged only by their past," and that "what looks bad on the outside may have a pure heart." This encodes values of empathy, openness, and respect for individual life processes.
- 3) Allah's Mercy as the Core of the Da'wah Message: Gus Miftah emphasizes that no sin is greater than Allah's mercy. He conveys that anyone who wishes to change will be welcomed by Allah with love, regardless of their dark past. This reflects the encoding of spiritual values emphasizing compassion and opportunities for repentance for all humans.

The use of familiar language, a relaxed narrative approach, and touches of humor make Gus Miftah's *da'wah* more relatable, especially for audiences from religiously marginalized social spaces. Through this approach, Gus Miftah successfully constructs a *da'wah* message that is communicative and spiritually stirring without alienating his audience.

#### b. Decoding (The Process of Message Interpretation)

In Stuart Hall's theory, decoding is the process by which audiences interpret messages based on their social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. In the context of the YouTube video titled "LC Karaoke Asks, Gus Miftah Preaches at Boshe," the researcher analyzes how audience comments reflect diverse interpretative positions toward the *da'wah* message encoded by Gus Miftah. Due to the open and anonymous nature of digital media, the researcher cannot access the commenters' personal identities. Anonymity on the internet can protect privacy and freedom of expression, but may also reduce accountability for statements (Azhari, 2020). However, this study focuses not on user identities but on the content of the comments as representations of audience interpretations of the *da'wah* message.

Thus, the analysis centers on differences in decoding positions, dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional, to comprehensively capture the dynamics of reception and interpretation of the *da'wah* message in the digital space. The researcher selected and analyzed comments relevant to the research topic to understand how the audience interprets Gus Miftah's *da'wah* message on YouTube. The results indicate three dominant positions aligned with Stuart Hall's theory:

Table 1. Decoding Results

| Decoding Position  | Number of Comments | Main Characteristics                                     |
|--------------------|--------------------|--|
| Dominant-Hegemonic | 813                | Fully accepts and supports Gus Miftah's <i>da'wah</i>    |
| Negotiated         | 1                  | Accepts the message but critiques the context and method |
| Oppositional       | 3                  | Rejects the message and method entirely                  |

### 1) Dominant-Hegemonic Position

In this position, the audience fully accepts the message and intent of Gus Miftah as encoded. They understand and support Gus Miftah's *da'wah* approach as a concrete manifestation of Islam as a religion of mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil alamin*). In the video, there are 813 comments predominantly showing this acceptance. Due to the similarity of many comments, the researcher does not explain everything in detail. Below are examples of audience responses in the dominant position:

**Agreeing responses:** Several YouTube users fully support Gus Miftah's preaching methods. For example, @sunosudar5322 wrote, "Gus Miftah preaches in places that truly need enlightenment, places often seen as sinful, dirty, and disgraceful. However, they also have hearts. Hopefully, through Gus Miftah's sermon, the faint light in their hearts will shine brightly again, so they find true guidance and understand the correct monotheism. Amen. Stay healthy, Gus, the marginalized communities still need you."

Another comment from @charlesrachma4205 states, "This is what an Islam open to the universal world looks like. The sermon's packaging is flexible, but the spiritual message hits the target. Awesome, Gus Miftah!" Meanwhile, @Hendri9319 expressed, "One of the clerics I admire not because he wants to be famous or viral, but because this is a unique way a religious figure invites Muslims and non-Muslims to learn religion in nightlife venues. Stay healthy, Gus." Similarly, @ratihpermana8002 commented, "If the preaching of religion looks nice, cool, not frontal, not terrorist. Thanks, Gus."

These four comments show that the audience accepts and agrees with Gus Miftah's preaching message as he encoded it. They see preaching in nightlife venues as a relevant approach to specific social conditions and consider that the spiritual message can still be delivered effectively even in spaces unusual by traditional preaching norms. This shows that the audience understands and fully supports the preaching approach.

**Supporting responses:** Other comments also fully support the content and the method of Gus Miftah's preaching. For example, @ahmadahmadmasrudi4110 wrote, "Very beneficial preaching without pressure and embracing everyone without discrimination because perfection belongs only to God. Stay healthy, Gus Miftah." @mochkholis9475 said, "May Allah's blessing always accompany Gus Miftah in his struggle, amen." Meanwhile, @ahal46 commented, "It's not easy to preach with this method. Behind the laughter and jokes, a preaching message is successfully conveyed. May the preacher be given complete strength and wisdom to



deliver wise words and advice so that everyone receives blessings and guidance from Allah SWT. May success continue on the path to seeking Allah's approval."

These three comments reinforce the audience's full acceptance of Gus Miftah's preaching message in terms of content and delivery method. In the encoding-decoding model, this indicates the success of the contextual and humanistic encoding of the preaching message.

## 2) Negotiated Position

Audiences in the negotiated position generally accept the message the media delivers but maintain a critical stance toward its application. In this context, the audience agrees with the intention and purpose of Gus Miftah's *da'wah* but questions the place and manner of delivery. In the analyzed video, the researcher found only one comment representing the negotiated position, indicating little diversity of views or interpretations toward the content.

The comment from @abdul981 reads: "The sermon's content is good, inviting those considered unaware to become aware. However, the clothing of those being preached to should be more modest, so it does not lead to suspicion. I am afraid they might tempt Gus. Just a suggestion."

This comment reflects an audience response that does not fully accept the preaching message but instead negotiates it. Although the message is considered meaningful and valuable, there is an objection to the visual and cultural aspects accompanying it, especially regarding the appearance of the audience being preached to, which is seen as not conforming to the norms of modesty. This response shows that acceptance of *da'wah* is influenced not only by the content of the message but also by the manner of delivery and the accompanying visual context. Within the encoding-decoding framework, this reflects the complexity of *da'wah* communication, where the message's meaning is not passively received but interpreted through the audience's values, experiences, and cultural views.

## 3) Oppositional Position

Audiences in the oppositional position reject the message, the delivery, and the method of Gus Miftah's *da'wah*. They consider this preaching approach as contaminating the sacred values of religion and not reflecting the sanctity of *da'wah* as it should be. In the analyzed video, there were three comments categorized as oppositional. This number is relatively small compared to the comments on the dominant position, indicating a majority positive acceptance.

Here are some comments reflecting the oppositional position: @adibzp96 wrote, "Want to see sexy people but hiding behind religion." @duelleo1955 commented, "Preet, Miftah's religious business." Meanwhile, @agusbanuanta3212 stated, "Long live Ustad Abdul Somad, a noble and wise man who is not showy. Long live Abdul Somad."

These three comments reflect active resistance to Gus Miftah's *da'wah*. The criticism targets not only the inappropriate preaching method but also doubts the sincerity of the intentions, and compares Gus Miftah with other religious figures deemed more worthy of emulation. In Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework, such responses indicate differences in value systems between the message sender

and the receiver, especially from conservative audiences, skeptical of the commercialization of religion, or who prefer conventional and formal preaching approaches. These comments underscore that every communication message, including *da'wah*, is deeply influenced by the audience's social, cultural, and ideological background. Thus, the same message can be received diversely, even completely rejected, depending on the context of the receiver.

## 2. Analysis Results of Gus Miftah's Da'wah Data Using Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding

Based on the analysis of Gus Miftah's da'wah video "LC Karaoke Bertanya, Gus Miftah Ngaji di Boshe" and comments from viewers on the Gus Miftah Official YouTube channel, this study found several important findings related to the da'wah's communication patterns and audience responses.

First, Gus Miftah constructs his da'wah message through a contextual and humanistic approach. The sermon is delivered in a relaxed style, interspersed with humor, and uses language close to the reality of night-time workers. This approach represents the encoding process that asserts that da'wah does not have to be conducted formally in sacred spaces but can take place in marginal spaces as an effort to touch the humanitarian side and offer hope to the audience. Da'wah can be done anywhere, including within economic and social contexts, such as in the weaving industry in Bira Village and Muhammadiyah's efforts to involve Indonesian Chinese Muslims to spread Islamic values within their communities (Mahmuddin et al., 2018; Nurjanah, 2024).

Second, the majority of viewers showed full acceptance of both the content and the methods of da'wah used. Comments praising the inclusive and non-judgmental approach indicate that most of the audience's decoding process is in a dominant-hegemonic position, meaning they accept the message as intended by the sender. The da'wah is seen as a manifestation of an open, inclusive Islam capable of reaching marginalized social groups. The da'wah reaches all layers of society through an inclusive and contextual approach, fosters social harmony, expands global reach, and strengthens Islamic values through education, interfaith cooperation, and social services (Nurcholis et al., 2021; Ahmad, 2020).

Third, some audiences give selective responses. They agree with the substance of the da'wah message but criticize certain aspects, such as the location of the delivery or the appearance of the congregation present. This response shows a negotiated position, where the audience accepts part of the message but rejects other parts based on their values or norms. The da'wah message is effectively delivered through social media platforms like YouTube and podcasts, which increase accessibility and engagement, especially among millennials. The use of regional languages in the sermons makes it easier for the audience to understand and more popular compared to using the national language, which resonates less with local communities (Anshar et al., 2024; Hidayah, 2021; Hamidah & Dungeik, 2024).

Fourth, some comments firmly reject Gus Miftah's da'wah methods and contexts. Sarcastic tones, accusations of religious exploitation, and comparisons with other religious figures considered more representative indicate an oppositional position. Audiences in this position tend to reject the message entirely because it is seen as not aligned with the

traditional da'wah values they believe in. Da'wah messages that are relevant to audience needs and emphasize moderation and tolerance, delivered by preachers who actively interact and utilize social media, tend to receive positive responses from the community, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of da'wah communication in building peace and combating radicalism (Nan et al., 2024; Hidayat et al., 2024; Thaib, 2020; Aini & Don, 2022).

Fifth, this study confirms that each individual's cultural, social, and religious backgrounds highly influence audience responses to da'wah messages. This reinforces that the meaning of da'wah messages is not singular but dynamic and open to diverse interpretations, depending on experiences, ideological preferences, and the context of each audience's reception. Effective non-verbal communication, such as hand gestures and facial expressions, is essential in conveying da'wah messages. In addition, preachers must adapt their methods to digital platforms favored by young audiences and maintain da'wah ethics, including delivering messages logically, morally, and honestly to ensure they are well received (Mohd Noor et al., 2022; Rohmatulloh et al., 2022; Rubino, 2023).

This research shows that contextual da'wah approaches like those of Gus Miftah can break through conventional space boundaries. The significantly dominant-hegemonic response indicates that religious messages can be widely accepted if delivered empathetically and contextually. However, challenges remain from audiences with conservative values or different aesthetic expectations. This study contributes to enriching digital da'wah studies and highlights the importance of understanding audiences as active subjects in shaping meaning, especially in spaces socially considered marginal.

#### D. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the communication strategy of da'wah in the video "LC Karaoke Bertanya, Gus Miftah Ngaji di Boshe" using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model. This approach aims to understand how the preacher constructed the da'wah message and how the audience interpreted it. In the video, the da'wah message is delivered contextually and humanistically, through a relaxed sermon style, containing humor, and using language close to the daily life of the audience, especially those from nightlife environments. This approach shows that da'wah can reach social spaces traditionally considered unconventional without losing its spiritual value. The analysis results indicate that most audiences fully accept the da'wah message and support the method. Others respond selectively; they agree with the content but question certain aspects, such as the location or appearance of the audience. Meanwhile, a small portion rejects this da'wah approach because it is considered inconsistent with the traditional da'wah norms they believe in. This study demonstrates that the social, cultural, and religious backgrounds of each influence responses to da'wah. This confirms that da'wah communication is dynamic and its meaning is open to various interpretations, depending on the experience and perspective of the audience.



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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Author 1 : Conceptualizer, data collector, data analyst  
Author 2 : Research methodologist, data interpreter, article writer  
Author 3 : Article improver, conclusion drafter, translator

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