

Digital Da'wah and Visual Pedagogy: An Empirical Study of Infographic Based Islamic Religious Education among UMS Student

Muhammad Azhari Fikri¹, Zaenal Abidin¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Surakarta

Corresponding author e-mail: g000220023@student.ums.ac.id , z_abidin@ums.ac.id

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Abstract: The rapid development of digital media has transformed Islamic da'wah practices in higher education, particularly among university students who are closely engaged with the visual culture of social media. This study examines infographic content design as a medium of digital da'wah for Islamic Religious Education (IRE) among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital observations, and documentation of Instagram content involving UMS students as active users. The findings indicate that infographics function effectively as both pedagogical and persuasive media by translating abstract Islamic values into concise, well-structured visual messages that align with students' digital consumption patterns. Visual clarity, aesthetic coherence, and narrative simplicity emerged as key design elements that enhance students' understanding, engagement, and reflective awareness, while repeated exposure to infographic content contributes to the gradual internalization of religious values. The novelty of this study lies in integrating visual communication principles and the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning within the context of Islamic digital da'wah in a faith-based university, highlighting infographic design as a mediating mechanism between pedagogical objectives and the contemporary visual culture of Muslim university students.

Keywords: *Digital Da'wah, Infographic Content Design, Islamic Religious Education, Instagram, University Students*

A. Introduction

The rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the digital era has catalyzed significant shifts across various dimensions of human life, including methods of interaction, information acquisition, and knowledge construction. This transformation extends beyond socio-economic sectors, profoundly influencing the field of education and the practice of Islamic da'wah (proselytizing). Social media has emerged as a strategic digital space, offering a flexible, interactive, and contextual platform for conveying religious messages that resonate with the lifestyles of the younger generation (Arista et al., 2025). In this context, Fakhruroji (2019) highlights that social media has transformed Islamic learning practices in Indonesia by shifting how religious authority is constructed and accessed by students through digital platforms.

The in Indonesia, social media engagement is exceptionally high among the youth, particularly university students. Instagram stands out as a primary platform due to its

emphasis on visual strength, utilizing images, illustrations, and graphic design. These characteristics make Instagram an effective medium for delivering da'wah messages that are concise, engaging, and easily accessible via mobile devices. Research indicates that Instagram successfully enhances the interest of Generation Z in da'wah content through its visual and communicative interface (Arista et al., 2025). Within the context of Islamic Education (PAI), social media serves a strategic role in internalizing Islamic values. PAI is not merely oriented toward the mastery of religious knowledge; it aims to cultivate character and religious attitudes in students. However, the primary challenge for PAI in the digital age is delivering meaningful Islamic messages through media that align with student characteristics namely, a preference for short, visual, and social media-based content (Prayoga, 2024).

One visual medium identified as effective for delivering concise and compelling messages is the infographic. Infographics represent a synthesis of text, data, and visual elements designed to facilitate audience comprehension. From a visual communication perspective, infographics simplify complex information while increasing audience engagement and attraction in digital spaces (Syaputri et al., 2025). This makes infographics highly relevant for digital da'wah on Instagram. In practice, they function as an effective tool for religious communication by packaging da'wah material simply without compromising its substantive meaning. According to Yildirim (2016), the dual-coding nature of infographics combining verbal and visual cues significantly reduces cognitive load, allowing for more efficient information processing in educational contexts. Furthermore, infographic-based content allows students to access and comprehend religious messages rapidly amidst the dense flow of digital information (Prayoga, 2024). Consequently, the utilization of infographics on Instagram represents an adaptive da'wah strategy tailored to the digital culture of university students.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital da'wah, a significant research gap remains regarding the intersection of visual communication design and religious pedagogy. Previous studies have predominantly focused on general content strategies or textual analysis, leaving a void in understanding how specific design elements of infographics are perceived by Islamic Education (PAI) students. Most existing research adopts a technical-descriptive approach, which fails to capture the 'lived experiences' and cognitive shifts of students when interacting with visual theological messages.

Addressing this void, the present study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to critically explore the subjective experiences of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. By shifting the focus from mere content delivery to the depth of student perception, this research aims to elucidate how infographic designs function as cognitive instruments that bridge the gap between abstract Islamic concepts and digital visual literacy.

The literature on digital da'wah demonstrates a substantial paradigm shift from conventional, text-centered religious communication toward the strategic use of social media as a visual, interactive, and meaning-making space for Islamic discourse. Recent studies consistently indicate that platforms such as Instagram have evolved beyond mere channels for disseminating religious messages and now function as arenas where religious meanings are visually constructed and negotiated, particularly among younger audiences.

Arista et al (2025) identify Instagram as an effective medium for da'wah targeting Generation Z due to its strong visual orientation, interactivity, and ease of access, which collectively enhance users' religious knowledge. Their findings underscore the growing importance of visual affordances in digital platforms for capturing attention and strengthening religious understanding in visually literate generations.

However, a comparative reading of the literature reveals that much of the existing research prioritizes platform effectiveness and frequency of media exposure over the communicative mechanisms through which religious messages are interpreted. For instance, Zahra (2022) reports a positive correlation between the intensity of Instagram use and changes in students' religious attitudes and practices, including increased participation in religious activities. While this contribution is significant, it largely emphasizes quantitative exposure and behavioral outcomes, offering limited insight into how the design quality of visual content mediates users' cognitive and reflective engagement with religious messages.

Consequently, the role of visual structure, narrative clarity, and aesthetic coherence in shaping religious meaning remains underexplored. Emerging scholarship has begun to address this limitation by examining visual design as a central element of digital da'wah communication. Zahra (2022) further argues that graphic design elements such as layout, color composition, and readability play a decisive role in attracting attention and enhancing audience recall of da'wah messages on Instagram. From a visual communication perspective, this aligns with the argument that visual design actively structures perception and interpretation rather than merely serving decorative purposes Ware (2013). Nonetheless, these studies tend to conceptualize visual design primarily as a tool for increasing engagement, without sufficiently linking it to pedagogical processes or the internalization of Islamic values over time.

A more content-oriented approach is evident in the qualitative study by Kustiawan et al (2025), which analyzes digital da'wah messages disseminated through Instagram accounts of prominent Islamic figures. Their findings demonstrate that visual narratives and communication styles significantly influence how audiences interpret religious messages and participate in online Islamic discourse. Although this research offers valuable insights into message construction and symbolic representation, it remains centered on content producers rather than audience experiences, leaving a gap in understanding how students subjectively experience and learn from visually mediated da'wah content. From an educational perspective, Winanda et al (2025) show that the integration of visual media in Islamic Religious Education contributes positively to students' engagement and responsiveness, reinforcing the relevance of visual-based learning in informal and non-formal religious education contexts.

This line of inquiry highlights the intersection between digital da'wah and visual pedagogy, suggesting that religious content on social media can function as an extension of learning beyond formal classroom settings. However, prior studies have not sufficiently examined infographics as a distinct visual genre with specific cognitive advantages, such as simplifying complex information and reducing cognitive load through structured visual hierarchies. Synthesizing these strands of literature reveals three dominant trends in digital da'wah research: (1) studies focusing on platform affordances and usage intensity,

(2) research emphasizing visual appeal and engagement, and (3) analyses of message content and religious narratives. Despite these advances, there remains a notable gap concerning how infographic design operates as a mediating mechanism between Islamic educational objectives and students' visual culture in higher education settings, particularly within faith-based universities.

Positioned within this gap, the present study contributes to the literature by integrating principles of visual communication and the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning to examine infographic-based digital da'wah in the context of Islamic Religious Education at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Unlike prior research that treats visual design, platform use, or religious messaging in isolation, this study foregrounds students' lived experiences to analyze how infographic content is perceived, cognitively processed, and internalized. By doing so, it advances digital da'wah scholarship through a pedagogically grounded and visually informed framework, offering empirical evidence that infographic design functions as a critical mediator linking da'wah objectives, learning processes, and the contemporary visual culture of Muslim university students.

B. Methods

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) in engaging with infographic-based da'wah content on Instagram. Phenomenology was selected to move beyond mere frequency of use, focusing instead on the subjective meanings individuals derive from their interactions with digital social phenomena (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2018). By adopting this paradigm, the research captures deep-seated perceptions specifically how students interpret and assign meaning to visual religious messages allowing for a contextual understanding that transcends quantitative variables (Moustakas, 1994).

The research subjects consisted of UMS students selected through purposive sampling techniques. This method enabled the researcher to determine informants based on specific criteria, such as active Instagram usage and direct involvement with infographic-based da'wah content. Although the initial framework considered six to ten informants, the focus remained on the depth of data rather than the number of participants, consistent with qualitative characteristics. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, observations, documentation, and field notes. While interviews were used to explore experiences and perceptions, observations focused on visual characteristics, message themes, and digital interaction patterns on various da'wah accounts. Documentation in the form of screenshots and interaction data strengthened the findings, while field notes served to record the contextual dynamics that emerged throughout the research process (Prayoga, 2024). The semi-structured interviews provided the necessary flexibility for participants to reflect on how visual design influences their religious understanding and daily lives (Tanwir et al., 2021).

These interviews were conducted between November 25 and November 30, 2025, involving three UMS students identified by the initials S, K, and T to maintain ethical confidentiality. This semi-structured method was chosen to provide the researcher with the latitude to probe deeper into the subjective impact of Instagram infographic designs as a medium for digital da'wah. Before the process began, the researcher contacted each

informant to ensure their voluntary participation, explaining the study's focus on Islamic Education (PAI) infographics. The interviews were conducted gradually in a comfortable atmosphere, focusing on how informants perceive infographic designs, how visualization affects their understanding of PAI material, and the extent to which such content impacts their religious and daily lives as students.

To ensure the quality and credibility (trustworthiness) of the data, this study utilized source and technique triangulation by cross-referencing information from interviews, observations, and documentation to minimize bias (Hossain et al., 2024). Furthermore, the researcher employed thick description to ensure that the context and meaning of these experiences could be fully comprehended by the reader. Peer debriefing was also conducted to test the analytical logic and ensure that the interpretations remained faithful to the raw data (Tanwir et al., 2021).

The data analysis was executed through a systematic Thematic Analysis as framed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This process involved a synthesis of multiple data sources, where results from in-depth interviews were cross-referenced with non-participant observations and the documentation of infographic visual elements. Themes were established only when there was a convergence of data from at least two different collection techniques (triangulation), ensuring a holistic phenomenological understanding. This analytical rigor was maintained until data saturation was reached, confirming that no new conceptual insights emerged from the informants, which justifies the use of a focused group of participants in this qualitative inquiry (Sandelowski, 1995).

Through this methodological approach, the research is expected to provide a profound understanding of the lived experiences of students regarding visual da'wah content on Instagram. Furthermore, it aims to offer both theoretical and practical insights into effective infographic content design strategies for digital da'wah targeted at the younger generation.

C. Results and Discussion

Result

The findings indicate that the use of infographic design on Instagram plays a significant role as a digital da'wah medium for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) among students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS). All research participants (Subjects S, K, and T) reported that infographic-based da'wah content is easier to understand than lengthy textual materials due to its concise presentation, visual structure, and use of accessible language. These characteristics align with the information consumption habits of university students as digital natives who are accustomed to fast-paced and visually oriented social media environments.

Subject S perceived that da'wah infographics effectively concretize abstract religious concepts such as Islamic moral and ethical values into communicative visual forms. Infographic content that is brief and non-preachy encourages sustained reading and motivates students to save the content as a form of religious reminder. This finding

suggests that infographics function not only as informational media but also as light reflective tools that are seamlessly integrated into students' everyday digital practices.

Subject K emphasized that visual aesthetics particularly text readability, color selection, and layout composition serve as primary determinants of engagement with da'wah content. Infographics that employ simple and well-structured designs tend to attract attention and are more likely to be read, whereas content with overly crowded or monotonous visual arrangements is often disregarded, despite conveying religious messages. This indicates that visual design operates as a crucial entry point for the reception of da'wah messages among students.

Meanwhile, Subject T highlighted that consistent exposure to da'wah infographics on Instagram functions as a gradual religious reminder rather than an immediate catalyst for behavioral change. Although such content does not always result in direct transformation of religious practices, it stimulates self-reflection and reinforces Islamic values over time. However, Subject T also cautioned that infographics prioritizing aesthetic appeal without sufficient substantive depth may lead to misinterpretation and diminish audience trust in da'wah content.

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study reinforce the view that infographics constitute a relevant and effective medium for digital da'wah among university students. Students' preference for visual content is consistent with the characteristics of digital natives, who tend to be more responsive to visually oriented information than to lengthy textual materials (Syaputri et al., 2025). Recent studies further indicate that younger generations process information rapidly and selectively, which increases the likelihood that visually packaged religious messages will be noticed, understood, and retained (Chen, B., & Wang, 2020; Manca, 2020). In this context, infographics function as a mediating medium that bridges Islamic values with the visual culture of social media, enabling da'wah messages to be delivered in a contextual manner aligned with students' communication patterns.

The effectiveness of infographics in enhancing religious understanding can be explained through the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009), which posits that learning is optimized when information is presented through integrated visual and verbal channels. Da'wah infographics allow students to process religious messages simultaneously through dual cognitive pathways, thereby reducing cognitive load and improving memory retention. Empirical support for this theoretical framework is evident in higher education research demonstrating that information visualization enhances comprehension of abstract concepts and strengthens learning retention, particularly in value- and morality-based education (Al-Hunaiyyan et al., 2017; Laily et al., 2022; Reza et al., 2024). Accordingly, da'wah infographics should be understood not merely as communication tools but also as effective pedagogical instruments in religious education.

The emphasis placed by Subject K on visual aesthetics highlights the role of graphic design as a determining factor in digital da'wah communication. Ware (2013) argues that well-designed visuals guide audience attention toward core messages while minimizing cognitive distractions. This perspective is supported by contemporary visual

communication studies demonstrating that text readability, visual hierarchy, and design consistency significantly influence user engagement on social media platforms (Bateman et al., 2017; Knafllic, 2020). Within the context of Instagram-based da'wah, visual aesthetics are therefore not simply decorative elements but strategic communication components that shape whether religious messages are perceived as relevant, credible, and worthy of engagement by students.

The repeated exposure to infographic-based da'wah content experienced by Subjects S and T suggests that digital da'wah operates cumulatively rather than instantaneously. This pattern aligns with the findings of Arista et al (2025), who report that consistent exposure to visual da'wah content contributes to gradual increases in students' religious awareness. Research in digital communication similarly indicates that meaningful repetition of visual messages can reinforce attitudes and values through long-term internalization processes (Lee, S., & Cho, 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2022). From an Islamic da'wah perspective, this mechanism corresponds with the principle of *da'wah bil-hikmah*, which emphasizes gradual message delivery that takes into account the psychological readiness of the audience (Rofiqo, 2025).

However, a critical reflection on Mayer's (2001) theory in the context of Instagram reveals a potential 'aesthetic-substance paradox. While visual minimalism successfully reduces cognitive load, it simultaneously risks oversimplifying complex Islamic theological nuances. This suggests that while infographics are superior in capturing initial engagement among UMS students, they may possess inherent limitations in fostering the rigorous intellectual depth required in Islamic Education (PAI). The 'rapid consumption' nature of social media could potentially lead to a superficial understanding where the beauty of the design overshadows the profundity of the sacred message. This finding extends the previous research by Fakhruroji (2019), suggesting that while digital platforms redefine religious authority through visual appeal, they also demand a new form of critical digital literacy to prevent the dilution of theological substance.

Nevertheless, this study also identifies several challenges associated with infographic-based digital da'wah, particularly in relation to visual and digital literacy. Variations in students' ability to interpret visual information may affect the effectiveness of message reception. Recent research suggests that low levels of visual literacy can lead to misinterpretation, even when content is aesthetically well designed (Avgerinou, M. D., & Pettersson, 2016; Manca, S., & Ranieri, 2017). Moreover, the rapidly evolving trends of Instagram require da'wah content creators to continually innovate in order to remain relevant, while simultaneously maintaining theological accuracy and substantive depth. These findings reinforce the argument that successful digital da'wah is shaped not only by visual appeal but also by the theological, pedagogical, and media literacy competencies of content creators (Arista et al., 2025; Kimmons et al., 2020; Rofiqo, 2025).

Within the context of Islamic higher education institutions such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS), da'wah infographics on Instagram also carry significant pedagogical implications. Visual da'wah content has the potential to function as a nonformal, flexible, and sustainable supplementary medium for Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Studies in higher education indicate that the integration of social media into learning environments can extend learning spaces and enhance student engagement

beyond formal classroom settings (Manca, 2020; Tess, 2013). Winanda et al (2025) further emphasize that visual media that are contextualized and relevant to students' lived experiences can strengthen religious understanding and reflective engagement. Consequently, da'wah infographics should be regarded not only as instruments of religious communication but also as adaptive pedagogical innovations that respond to the characteristics of students in the digital era.

D. Conclusions

Based on the discussion, this study concludes that infographic content design on Instagram plays a strategic and multidimensional role as a medium for digital Islamic Religious Education (PAI) da'wah among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Infographics are shown to be effective in conveying Islamic messages in a concise, visual, and easily comprehensible manner, aligning with the characteristics of students as digital natives who are more responsive to visual-based information than to lengthy textual content (Syaputri et al., 2025). These findings underscore that the transformation of da'wah in the digital era requires not only media adaptation but also the reconfiguration of communication strategies that correspond to the information consumption patterns of younger audiences.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the relevance of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2001) within the context of Islamic da'wah and religious education. The integration of visual and verbal elements in infographic design facilitates the concretization of abstract PAI concepts, thereby enhancing students' comprehension and retention of religious messages. Moreover, consistent exposure to visual da'wah content contributes to the gradual internalization of Islamic values, indicating that digital da'wah operates through cumulative, long-term mechanisms rather than immediate behavioral change (Laily et al., 2022). In this regard, the study contributes theoretically by extending the application of multimedia learning theory to the domain of digital Islamic da'wah in higher education settings.

Practically, the findings offer important implications for PAI educators and digital da'wah content managers. For educators, infographics can function as flexible and sustainable non-formal learning media that enrich students' religious learning experiences beyond the formal classroom. For da'wah content practitioners, visual design quality—including readability, typography, color composition, and visual hierarchy—emerges as a critical determinant of audience engagement (Ware, 2013). Accordingly, the development of infographic-based da'wah content should involve a collaborative integration of graphic design competence, media literacy, and theological understanding to ensure that messages are not only visually appealing but also accurate and meaningful.

Nevertheless, this study also identifies several challenges, including disparities in students' digital and visual literacy, limitations in technological access, and the ongoing demand for content innovation amid rapidly evolving social media dynamics. These challenges highlight the necessity of balancing visual creativity with substantive depth to maintain contextual relevance, credibility, and ethical integrity in the communication of Islamic teachings (Arista et al., 2025; Rofiqo, 2025). Excessive or disproportionate visual emphasis

may lead to misinterpretation and undermine audience trust, underscoring the importance of ethical considerations and content accuracy in infographic-based da'wah production.

As recommendations for future research, this study suggests further investigation using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to empirically measure the impact of infographic-based da'wah on students' religious attitudes and behaviors. Comparative studies across different social media platforms or higher education contexts are also recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital da'wah effectiveness within diverse digital ecosystems. Overall, the integration of multimedia learning principles, graphic design aesthetics, and ethical da'wah communication strategies presents significant opportunities for the development of adaptive, sustainable, and contextually relevant Islamic da'wah for contemporary Muslim youth.

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