



Digital Populism in Islamic Da'wah: A Rhetorical Analysis of @iqdammuhammad's Instagram Communications

Siti Waqiatul Hasanah¹, Widadi², Danil Kiromah³, Syifa Aghniya Ridwan⁴,
Abdullah Sattar⁵ 

^{1, 2, 4} Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, Indonesia

³ Universitas Annuqayah, Sumenep, Indonesia

⁴ North Henan Medical University, China

Email: kikiarrofiq@gmail.com^{*1}, widadiamado247@gmail.com², lubtarakapten@gmail.com³,
syfaghniya18@gmail.com⁴, martabakbangsattar@uinsa.ac.id⁵

*Corresponding Author

Received: 01 December 2025

Revised: 31 January 2026

Accepted: 17 January 2026

Published: 22 March 2026

To cite this article: Hasanah, S. W., Widadi, Kiromah, Ridwan, S. A., & Sattar, A. (2026). Digital Populism in Islamic Da'wah: A Rhetorical Analysis of @iqdammuhammad's Instagram Communications. *Wasilatuna : Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam*, 9(1), 93–7.

ABSTRACT

This study discusses the process of public communication in da'wah conducted through the Instagram account @iqdammuhammad, focusing on the application of Aristotle's rhetorical strategies, which include ethos, pathos, and logos. The background of this research stems from the phenomenon of persuasive communication strategies in accordance with the characteristics of social media and audience preferences, particularly among young people. This study aims to analyze how these three rhetorical elements are implemented in Gus Iqdam's da'wah content and how their application affects the effectiveness of public communication in disseminating religious messages. The research method used a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis techniques on several posts that represent the preaching communication strategy on the account. The results of the study show that ethos is reflected through scholarly credibility, a religious image, and consistency in delivering messages. Pathos is seen through a communicative delivery style, use of humor, and engaging visuals, creating an emotional connection with the audience. Logos appears through arguments based on religious texts and rational explanations relevant to daily life. The integration of these three rhetorical aspects contributes to increased audience engagement and the cognitive and affective reception of preaching messages. In conclusion, the study affirms that utilizing Aristotle's rhetorical strategies in digital preaching can enhance the effectiveness of public communication on Instagram.

Keywords: Dakwah Digital, Ethos Pathos Logos, Instagram Account @iqdammuhammad, Public Communication, Retorika.

INTRODUCTION

Da'wah fundamentally constitutes a form of public communication aimed at transmitting Islamic teachings to transform individual and collective consciousness, attitudes, and behavioral orientations in accordance with religious values (Aziz et al., 2025; Meuleman, 2011; Syamsudin et al., 2026). In the contemporary era, marked by the unprecedented expansion of digital technologies and networked media, the practices and

structures of da'wah have undergone a profound transformation. This transformation does not merely signify a shift from physical to digital space, but rather represents a reconfiguration of communicative norms, rhetorical conventions, and the sociocultural relationship between religious authority and its audience (Zuhri, 2021).

Within this rapidly evolving communicative environment, the emergence of Gus Iqdam, particularly through the Instagram account @iqdammuhammad, constitutes a distinctive and culturally significant phenomenon that warrants scholarly attention. Unlike many other prominent digital preachers, whose styles tend to remain within the established norms of formal religious discourse, Gus Iqdam deliberately employs localized dialects, colloquial expressions, and other regional linguistic markers that resonate strongly with everyday communal experiences. These linguistic choices diverge markedly from the standardized, formalized language traditionally associated with Islamic preaching (Rosowsky, 2012a), thereby constituting an anomaly in the conventional paradigm of da'wah communication (Ismail, 2018a).

This apparent deviation from normative preaching conventions is not a mere stylistic variation, but signals a deeper cultural and ideological shift in the way religious messages are articulated and legitimized in the public sphere (Turner, 2008). The integration of humor, informality, regional identity, and vernacular authenticity reconfigures the position of the preacher from a distant moral authority to a culturally embedded communicator who speaks from within, rather than above, the lived realities of his audience (Wickramasinghe et al., 2025). Consequently, da'wah in this context transcends its role as a one-directional transmission of doctrinal content and becomes a participatory, culturally negotiated form of discourse (Wickramasinghe et al., 2025).

This phenomenon reflects a broader transformation in the epistemology of religious communication in the digital age (Wickramasinghe et al., 2025). Authority is no longer derived solely from traditional scholarly lineage or institutional affiliation, but increasingly from communicative proximity, cultural resonance, and the ability to construct emotional and symbolic intimacy with online publics (Baker & Rojek, 2020). The use of localized language and culturally specific references thus functions not only as a rhetorical strategy (pathos), but as a performative act that redefines the boundaries of religious legitimacy and authenticity in the digital sphere (Sultana, 2022).

The scholarly landscape of digital da'wah has been extensively mapped by previous studies, which primarily focus on the utilization of digital platforms for theological branding or the role of influencers in shaping lifestyle among urban Muslims (Zaid et al., 2022). While recent inquiries into Gus Iqdam's phenomenon have begun to emerge, they predominantly emphasize his linguistic hybridity as a tool for social inclusion or analyze the psychological loyalty of his congregation (Huda, 2025a). However, there remains a critical lacuna in understanding how these vernacular performances are systematically structured through classical rhetorical pillars to construct a form of digital populism that transcends traditional religious hierarchies.

Therefore, the present study does not merely investigate "da'wah on social media" as a technological adaptation (Kahfi & Mahmudi, 2024). Rather, it seeks to interrogate a critical

moment of cultural transition in religious communication whereby conventional hierarchies of discourse are destabilized and replaced by more fluid, hybrid, and context-dependent modes of expression (Jong, 2025). Through the analytical lens of Aristotle's rhetorical framework ethos, pathos, and logos this research explores how Gus Iqdam's communicative practices exemplify the convergence of classical rhetorical principles and contemporary vernacular culture in producing a new model of digital da'wah. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader academic discourse on religion and communication, offering insight into how localized linguistic identity and non conventional rhetorical performances can reconstruct the meaning, function, and effectiveness of da'wah in an increasingly mediatized and culturally fragmented world (Rosowsky, 2012b).

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the public communication processes within digital da'wah carried out through the Instagram account @iqdammuhammad. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables the exploration of meanings, communication patterns, and rhetorical strategies utilized by the preacher in the context of social media in a contextual and interpretive manner (Cheong, 2014). According to Moleong, qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena based on the perspectives of the subjects and their natural settings (Mohajan, 2018). This approach is relevant for examining da'wah communication processes that are dynamic, participatory, and meaning-oriented, rather than merely centered on quantitative measurement (Krijnen et al., 2021). Therefore, this method enables the researcher to interpret the application of Aristotle's three rhetorical elements ethos, pathos, and logos as manifested in the digital da'wah content produced by Gus Iqdam.

Qualitative content analysis was applied to examine the da'wah messages presented in selected posts from the Instagram account @iqdammuhammad. Referring to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is understood as a systematic method designed to generate replicable and context-sensitive interpretations of textual and visual data (Krippendorff, 2018; Kvist Møller & Airoidi, 2025). In this research, the method was used to identify rhetorical elements in the form of symbols, narratives, visual compositions, and linguistic expressions that embody Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos (Bambang Arianto et al., 2025).

The primary data were obtained through purposive sampling of posts published on the @iqdammuhammad account over a three-month period, specifically from October to December 2025. To ensure that the selected posts were representative of Gus Iqdam's communication strategy (Huda, 2025b). The selection criteria were strictly defined: (1) posts with the highest audience engagement, specifically those exceeding 50,000 likes and 1,000 comments; (2) posts explicitly containing religious messages or reflective statements on socio-moral issues; and (3) posts that prominently feature regional linguistic markers and vernacular authenticity (Huda, 2025). Based on these criteria, a total corpus of 45 posts was selected for in-depth analysis. The analysis was conducted by tracing how each rhetorical element, ethos, pathos, and logos, appears through the structure of the message, the mode of

delivery (including language style and visual presentation), and the audience's responses as reflected in the comment section and other forms of interaction. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how persuasive communication is constructed and negotiated in digital spaces as part of contemporary da'wah practices. Meanwhile, the secondary data were derived from relevant academic literature, including books, journal articles, and studies on Aristotle's rhetorical theory, public communication, and digital da'wah (Aisyah, 2022).

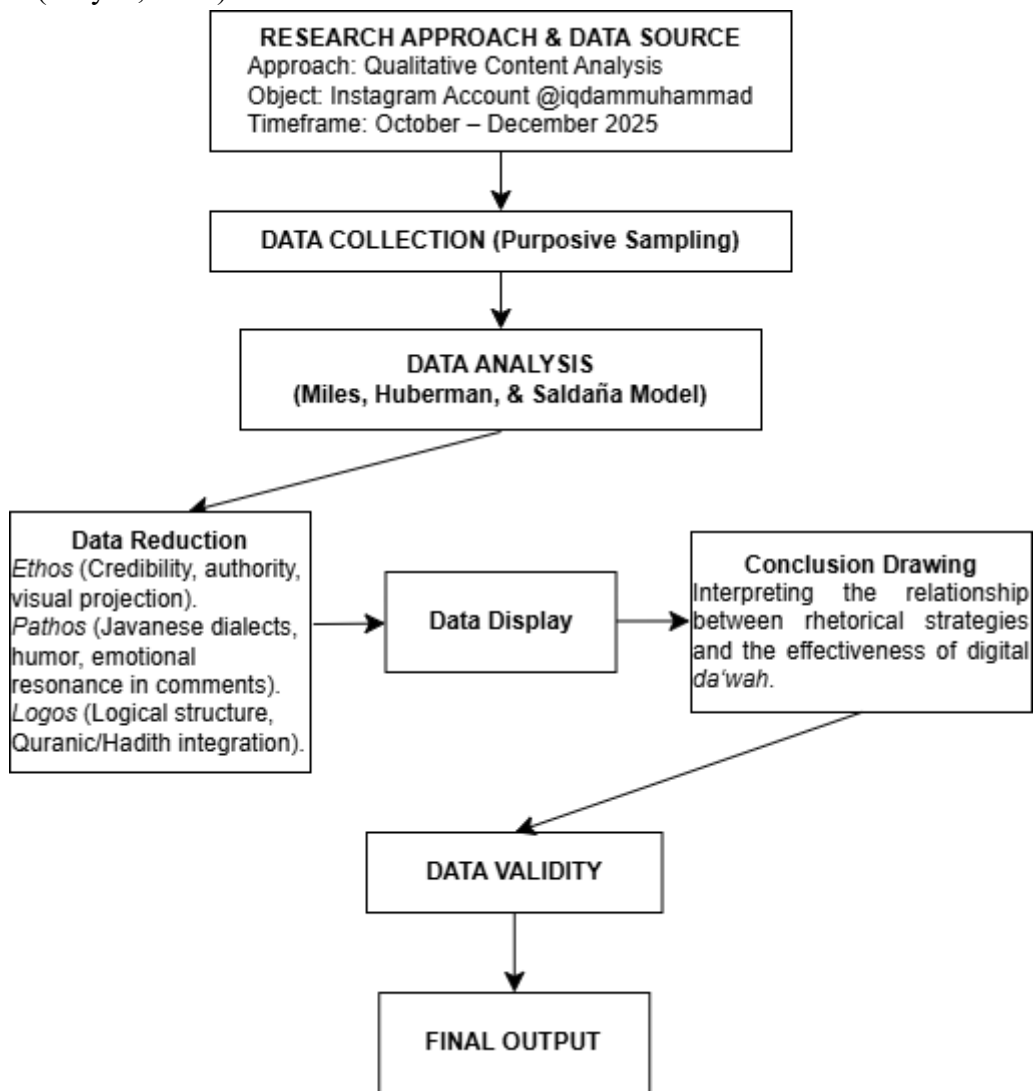


Figure 1. Research Flowchart of Qualitative Content Analysis on @iqdammuhammad.

The analytical process was operationalized by identifying and categorizing rhetorical elements ethos, pathos, and logos across symbols, narratives, visual compositions, and linguistic expressions (Bambang Arianto et al., 2025). Ethos was analyzed through the visual and linguistic projection of scholarly credibility and religious authority. Pathos was traced through the mode of delivery, including the use of colloquial Javanese dialects, humor, and emotional resonance evident in the audience's responses within the comment section. Logos

was evaluated based on the logical structure of the messages and the rational integration of religious texts (Oeppen Hill, 2020).

The data analysis was carried out in stages through the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Monaro et al., 2022). Data reduction was carried out by selecting posts that were relevant to the focus of the study and subsequently classifying them into the categories of ethos, pathos, and logos. The reduced data were then presented descriptively and organized into tables to facilitate the identification of emerging rhetorical patterns. The final stage involved concluding an in-depth interpretation of the relationship between the rhetorical elements and the effectiveness of public communication in digital da'wah. The validity of the data was maintained through source triangulation and sustained observation to ensure that the resulting interpretations are credible and scientifically accountable (Sridharan, 2021).

To provide a comprehensive visualization of the research design, the sequential workflow of this study is systematically illustrated in Figure 1. The flowchart maps the entire methodological progression, encompassing the initial data collection from the @iqdammuhammad account, the purposive sampling criteria yielding the 45 selected posts, and the interactive data analysis phase based on the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. This visual summary demonstrates how the raw multimodal data were methodically reduced, categorized into Aristotelian rhetorical elements (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*), and triangulated to ensure the scientific rigor of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Matrix of Rhetorical Strategies in @iqdammuhammad's Digital Da'wah

Rhetorical Element	Primary Strategy / Indicator	Empirical Evidence from Instagram Data	Analytical Function
Ethos	Visual and spatial accessibility; deconstruction of formal clerical hierarchy.	Wearing a simple white shirt (<i>baju putih</i>), sitting closely with the congregation without a high podium (Nov 15, 2025).	Cultivates vernacular authority; portrays the preacher as an embedded community member rather than a distant moral dictator.
Pathos	Reappropriation of Javanese street jargon and emotional validation of marginalized groups.	Using the term " <i>mantan garangan</i> " (former thugs) as a badge of honor for their charitable contributions (<i>shodaqoh</i>).	Triggers psychological intimacy and emotional loyalty; transforms societal outcasts into active religious participants.

Logos	Simplification and contextualization of classical Arabic maxims into everyday urban logic.	Translating " <i>inna ilaika robbika haqqon</i> " into relatable work-life balance advice for hustle-culture urbanites (Oct 26, 2025).	Ensures complex theological concepts are intellectually comprehensible and practically applicable for digital audiences.
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Ethos: Visual Identity and the Construction of Vernacular Authority

Gus Iqdam constructs his ethos (credibility) not through traditional, rigid clerical formality, but through visual and linguistic accessibility. In the analyzed videos, such as the Reel posted on November 15, 2025 (which garnered 6,565 likes), he deliberately avoids the strict hierarchical distance often maintained by traditional clerics. In this post, he is visually presented wearing a simple white shirt (*baju putih*), directly interacting with and awarding children who are diligent in reciting the Quran. This visual deconstruction of the 'sacred cleric' breaks down hierarchical barriers. By physically and socially positioning himself among the congregation, often sitting at the same level (*lesehan*) rather than on an elevated pulpit, he establishes an authentic, culturally embedded authority. In the digital sphere, where audiences are highly critical of elitism, this vernacular *ethos* is legitimized not merely by his religious knowledge but by his tangible presence, humility, and genuine care for the grassroots community (Ingraham, 2013).

Pathos: Emotional Resonance Through Vernacular Jargon

Pathos in Gus Iqdam's digital *da'wah* relies heavily on emotional proximity, primarily constructed through Javanese colloquialisms and street culture terminology. A prominent example is his reappropriation of the term "*garangan*" (traditionally a derogatory Javanese term for street thugs or marginalized, unruly youth). The caption of the November 15, 2025 post revealed a profound narrative: the funds given to the achieving children were donated by "*mantan garangan*" (former thugs) who previously wasted their money on online gambling. Instead of condemning them using strict theological threats of hellfire, Gus Iqdam embraces this group without judgment. He transforms their identity from societal outcasts into active contributors of charity (*shodaqoh*). This linguistic and psychological validation functions as a powerful *pathos* mechanism, triggering deep emotional engagement and loyalty from the marginalized youth (Seligman, 2023). This emotional resonance is evident in the positive audience responses, such as comments expressing profound gratitude and solidarity: "*Masya ALLAH Tabarakallah... bersama Keluarga Besar di ST Nyel*" (ST Nyel refers to *Sabilu Taubah Nyel*, signifying pure or total devotion to the congregation).

Logos: Rationalizing Islamic Texts for Urban Digital Audiences

While his delivery is highly informal, the underlying *logos* (logical structure) of Gus Iqdam's sermons remains firmly rooted in classical Islamic teachings (*Kitab Kuning*). However, to adapt to the diverse and fast-paced digital audience, he simplifies complex

theological arguments into practical rationality. For instance, in a Reel dated October 26, 2025, during a massive sermon at the Jakarta International Velodrome (garnering 8,824 likes), he addressed the urban hustle culture and the anxieties of millennial workers. He logically structured his argument by citing Arabic religious maxims: "*inna ilaika robbika haqqon*" and "*walika alaikhan haqqon.*" Instead of delivering a rigid, abstract doctrinal lecture, he translated these texts into a relatable work-life balance logic: "*Kamu itu boleh rajin, kerja secapek-capeknya, jangan lupa hak kepada Tuhannya... jangan lupa hakmu kepada dirimu sendiri*" (You can be diligent, work as hard as you can, but do not forget your Lord's rights, and do not forget the rights of your own body). This approach bridges the gap between ancient texts and modern socioeconomic realities, ensuring that the message is intellectually comprehensible for lay urban audiences without sacrificing its religious validity (Meyer, 2006).

Discussion: The Architecture and Challenges of Digital Populism in Da'wah

The synergistic application of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* by Gus Iqdam demonstrates a profound epistemological shift in contemporary Islamic *da'wah*, directly answering the cultural transition outlined at the beginning of this study (Santuso, 2025). The findings confirm that the transformation of *da'wah* on Instagram does not merely signify a migration from physical mosques to digital platforms; rather, it represents a structural reconfiguration of religious authority. Unlike traditional preaching paradigms that rely heavily on rigid institutional hierarchy, formal academic lineage (*sanad*), and standardized Arabic-infused rhetoric, Gus Iqdam operationalizes Instagram's affordances to construct 'Digital Populism.' By strategically integrating localized dialects, colloquial humor, and visual simplicity, he successfully dismantles the hegemonic boundaries between the "sacred cleric" and the "profane layperson." He democratizes access to religious teachings, making them inclusive and participatory for marginalized demographics such as the "*garangan*" who previously felt alienated or judged by formal, puritanical religious institutions.

This populist architecture is highly effective because it leverages the algorithmic logic of social media, which prioritizes emotional resonance (*pathos*) and authenticity (*ethos*) over purely doctrinal transmissions (Klein, 2024). By adopting the vernacular identity of the grassroots, Gus Iqdam shifts the position of the preacher from a distant moral dictator to an intimately embedded cultural communicator. His rhetoric does not speak *down* to the audience; it speaks *from within* their lived, everyday socioeconomic realities. This confirms the premise that in the contemporary digital era, religious legitimacy is no longer derived solely from scholarly lineage, but increasingly from communicative proximity and the ability to foster symbolic intimacy with online publics (Zafar & Blackmer, 2025).

However, as this study's empirical data reveals, this digital populism is a double-edged sword that introduces unprecedented vulnerabilities, particularly regarding the phenomenon of "context collapse" (the flattening of diverse audiences into a single digital space) and political intersection. The data from the October 26, 2025 post exposes the inherent fragility of digital *da'wah*. Because the sermon was associated with a prominent political figure, the

algorithm distributed the content beyond his loyal congregation to a broader, highly heterogeneous digital public. Consequently, the comment section (totaling over 611 interactions) transformed into a fiercely contested arena. Digital audiences critically challenged Gus Iqdam's established *ethos*, leaving cynical remarks such as "*Gus membela yang bayar*" (The cleric defends whoever pays) and quoting critical sociological aphorisms like "*Agama digunakan untuk menhibur orang miskin agar tidak memberontak*" (Religion is used to pacify the poor so they do not rebel).

This socio-political friction illustrates the ultimate paradox of digital populism in religious communication (Гаращук & Соколовський, 2025). A populist *ethos* built upon the illusion of absolute solidarity with the grassroots can be rapidly dismantled when the digital audience perceives a misalignment between the preacher's vernacular identity and elite political interests. The critical pushback from the netizens indicates that the modern digital congregation is not a passive recipient of doctrinal content; they are active, critical participants who continuously negotiate, validate, or reject religious authority. Therefore, the successful application of Aristotelian rhetoric on social media requires more than just persuasive linguistic skills. It demands constant vigilance in maintaining digital authenticity and a highly strategic navigation of the socio-political context, proving that authority in the digital sphere is never absolute, but perpetually contested.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study affirm that the process of public communication in Islamic preaching conducted through the Instagram account @Iqdammuhammad demonstrates a high level of effectiveness through the application of Aristotle's rhetorical strategies namely *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos*, manifested through the preacher's credibility, religious character, and consistency in message delivery, enables him to gain legitimacy and trust from the audience. *Pathos*, presented through emotional appeals, a communication style that resonates with the lives of younger generations, and the use of humor and visual elements, successfully fosters psychological closeness and encourages more active audience engagement in the preaching process. *Logos*, reflected in logical argumentation, clear religious evidence, and contextual examples from everyday life, contributes to the audience's rational comprehension and acceptance of the religious messages.

The integration of these three rhetorical components indicates that the success of digital preaching depends not only on the substance of religious messages but also on the preacher's ability to package the content using persuasive strategies that are adaptive to the characteristics of social media. This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of da'wah communication studies in the digital era, and it demonstrates that new media can serve as an effective space for disseminating Islamic values when managed with appropriate rhetorical strategies that are responsive to audience needs.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Grammarly to assist with grammar checking and language refinement. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and originality of the publication's final version.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Authorship contributions are reported following the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) system.

- a. **Siti Waqiatul Hasanah:** Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, and Writing – Review & Editing.
- b. **Widadi:** Validation, Investigation, and Writing – Review & Editing.
- c. **Syifa Aghniya Ridwan:** Visualization, Resources, and Writing – Review & Editing.
- d. **Abdullah Sattar:** Supervision, Project Administration, and Validation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel for providing access to research facilities, academic guidance, and data resources used in this study.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. Data used in this research will be made available upon request to the corresponding author at kikiarrofiq@gmail.com.

Funding Statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethical Approval Statement

The authors confirm that this study adheres to ethical research standards. No patient-identifying information was used. As this research primarily analyzed publicly available data on a social media platform (Instagram), formal institutional ethical approval was not required.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Siti Waqiatul Hasanah is a graduate student in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Indonesia. She earned her bachelor's degree in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting. Her academic interests include Islamic da'wah, community empowerment, communication theory, and religious social institutions. She has conducted research and published scholarly articles related to community development. She is actively involved in academic activities and community service. She can be contacted via email at kikiarrofiq@email.com.

Widadi is a graduate student in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, Indonesia. She completed her undergraduate program in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting at the Madura State Islamic Institute, Indonesia, from 2020 to 2024. Her academic interests and research include Islamic da'wah, da'wah communication, communication theory, political communication, and studies on religious social institutions.

In addition to her academic activities, she is also actively involved in various academic forums and literacy communities aimed at strengthening social and religious engagement, as well as following socio-political issues. She can be contacted via email at widadiamado247@gmail.com

Syifa Aghniya Ridwan is a third-year student in the Clinical Medicine program at North Henan Medical University, Xinxiang, Henan Province, China. She is pursuing education in the medical field with a focus on strengthening basic clinical competencies. Her academic interests include clinical medicine and public health, particularly in promotive and preventive health services. She is active in student organizational activities that support personal capacity development and professionalism in the health field. She can be contacted via email: syfaghniya18@gmail.com

Abdullah Sattar is a lecturer in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Indonesia. His academic interests and research include Islamic da'wah, communication theory, political communication, intercultural communication, community empowerment, and the study of religious social institutions. He has been extensively involved in research and has produced numerous scientific publications addressing societal issues within the social sciences in the field of communication and da'wah. In addition to his research activities, he actively participates in academic forums and community service programs aimed at strengthening social, religious, and educational development. He can be contacted via email at martabakbangsattar@uinsa.ac.id.