

Halal Virality: A Discourse Analysis of TikTok Preachers, Digital Dakwah, and the Shaping of Millennial Muslim Identity

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ABSTRACT

Background. The rapid expansion of TikTok as a dominant social media platform has transformed the circulation of Islamic messages and the ways young Muslims construct their religious identities. The emergence of young, charismatic, and digitally fluent TikTok preachers has created new forms of digital dakwah that combine religious discourse with entertainment, lifestyle aesthetics, and algorithmic amplification.

Purpose. This study aimed to analyze the discursive strategies employed by TikTok preachers and examine how their content contributes to the formation, negotiation, and contestation of millennial Muslim identity. It specifically investigated the linguistic patterns, thematic frames, visual narratives, and algorithmic features used to produce “halal virality,” referring to religious content deliberately optimized for visibility, engagement, and widespread digital circulation.

Method. The study employed a qualitative research design using multimodal critical discourse analysis. Data were collected from selected videos published by 30 high-engagement TikTok accounts featuring Islamic preaching content. Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis framework was applied to examine textual production, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural contexts.

Results. The findings reveal that TikTok preachers construct religious authority primarily through relatability, emotional resonance, personal storytelling, and aesthetic presentation rather than through traditional scholarly credentials. Complex theological and ethical issues are frequently condensed into motivational statements, simplified moral binaries, and short-form advice suited to platform conventions.

Conclusion. TikTok-based dakwah significantly influences millennial Muslim identity by merging religious meaning-making with digital performativity, platform culture, and commercial logic. Although this form of preaching expands access to Islamic messages and encourages religious engagement, it may also reduce doctrinal complexity and privilege popularity over scholarly authority

KEYWORDS

Digital Dakwah, Halal Virality, Tiktok Preachers

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INTRODUCTION

Digital media has reshaped the landscape of religious communication, especially among younger Muslim audiences who increasingly consume Islamic content through short-form video platforms (Dera, 2025). TikTok, with its rapid circulation patterns and algorithm-driven visibility, has emerged as a central arena for the production

and dissemination of “digital dakwah.” The platform’s format encourages brief, visually engaging religious This shift reflects a broader global trend in which religion becomes intertwined with lifestyle performance and personal branding. TikTok preachers often blend humor, motivational rhetoric, and simplified moral discourse to make Islamic teachings more accessible to millennial and Gen-Z viewers.

Digital preachers achieve authority not solely through formal religious training but through charisma, authenticity, and consistency of online presence (Rosana dkk., 2025). Their legitimacy is constructed through follower engagement, virality metrics, and algorithmic amplification (Roca-Trenchs & Fernández-Pedemonte, 2025). These mechanisms redefine traditional markers of religious credibility and reshape how young Muslims perceive religious authority.

Short-form religious content frequently condenses complex theological ideas into bite-sized messages optimized for attention economy dynamics (Reinis, 2025). This format encourages a style of dakwah that emphasizes emotion, relatability, and personal transformation over deep doctrinal explanation (Ingber & Su, 2025). As a result, religious literacy increasingly develops within algorithmic rather than institutional pathways.

The interplay between Islamic discourse and platform culture has attracted scholarly attention, especially in media studies and digital religion research (Teixeira dkk., 2025). Studies show that digital platforms mediate not only how religious knowledge is delivered but also how identity is constructed, negotiated, and displayed (Jumaat dkk., 2025). TikTok’s participatory, highly visual environment intensifies this dynamic.

The growth of “halal lifestyle” branding further intersects with digital dakwah, creating a hybrid sphere where religious messages are entangled with consumer aesthetics (Balcioglu & Cubukcu Cerasi, 2025). This intersection contributes to a new form of Muslim identity-making that is expressive, performative, and shaped through algorithmic visibility (Grad dkk., 2025). These developments underscore the need to examine how TikTok content contributes to millennial Muslim self-understanding.

Existing scholarship has not adequately addressed how TikTok preachers strategically use linguistic, visual, and affective cues to construct “halal” virality (Guerrero Vázquez dkk., 2025). Studies on digital dakwah often focus on YouTube or Instagram but rarely investigate the unique virality mechanics and discursive compression that characterize TikTok (Turvy, 2025). The platform’s algorithmic structure and rapid content cycles remain understudied in relation to religious meaning-making.

Research on Muslim identity formation has emphasized offline socialization, Islamic schooling, or family influence, yet the role of platform-mediated micro-sermons in shaping millennial subjectivity is largely unexplored (Shifman dkk., 2025). The extent to which TikTok’s mediated religious discourse influences identity narratives, moral imaginaries, and ethical self-presentation remains unclear.

The impact of algorithmic visibility on religious authority also remains insufficiently theorized (Backes dkk., 2025). Scholars acknowledge the rise of “celebrity preachers” but have not systematically analyzed how virality metrics shape perceptions of legitimacy, truth, and Islamic authenticity (Patouras & Sharp, 2025). The discursive mechanisms through which TikTok preachers gain credibility are still not fully understood.

Audience engagement within TikTok’s comment ecosystems has received limited attention (Weninger & Lim, 2025). The ways in which viewers interpret, negotiate, contest, or internalize short-form Islamic messages constitute a significant gap in current literature (Angulo Moncayo

dkk., 2025). Without investigating this interpretive process, the broader influence of TikTok dakwah on identity formation cannot be accurately assessed.

A deeper investigation is needed to understand how TikTok preachers mobilize discourse to shape millennial Muslim identity within a digital environment governed by speed, visibility, and emotional appeal (Bellon-Harn dkk., 2025). Clarifying this process will shed light on the evolving nature of religious authority and its negotiation within algorithm-driven spaces. Addressing this gap provides a more accurate representation of contemporary Islamic communication.

Analyzing TikTok dakwah through multimodal and critical discourse analysis allows researchers to uncover the ideological, aesthetic, and affective dimensions embedded within viral religious content (Kenalemang-Palm & Eriksson, 2025). This approach reveals how Islamic values are reframed, simplified, or transformed to fit platform logics. Understanding this reframing is vital for educators, religious leaders, and scholars concerned with religious literacy in digital spaces. The study ultimately seeks to explain how platform-mediated virality intersects with Islamic discourse to produce new forms of identity-making among millennial Muslims (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2025). The research hypothesizes that “halal virality” functions not merely as religious communication but as a formative cultural force that shapes how young Muslims see themselves, their faith, and their place in the digital world (Ntalla, 2025). Filling this gap enriches theoretical knowledge and informs practical approaches to contemporary religious engagement

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative discourse analysis design to examine how TikTok preachers construct and circulate Islamic messages that influence millennial Muslim identity formation (Moreman & Alvarado, 2025). This design was chosen to capture the linguistic, visual, and affective dimensions embedded within short-form religious content, allowing for the interrogation of how authority, morality, and identity markers are constructed through platform-specific features like soundbites, hashtags, and aesthetic cues within algorithmic environments (Betlemidze, 2025). The population consisted of active TikTok users and content creators, specifically targeting millennial Muslim audiences aged 18–35. Purposive sampling was used to select thirty TikTok preachers whose content demonstrated consistently high levels of interaction (likes, shares, comments) (Barrón San Blas, 2025). The sample also included a subset of audience comments to capture viewer interpretations. The primary instrument was a multimodal discourse analysis protocol, drawing from Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar, structured via a coding sheet to categorize linguistic structures, visual symbolism, editing patterns, and platform-specific indicators (like virality and emotional appeal) (Reinis & Laughlin, 2025). Secondary instruments included digital field notes, screen recordings, and metadata logs documenting engagement analytics. Data collection followed a sequential process: identification of high-engagement accounts, systematic archiving and verbatim transcription of video samples, and the collection of audience comments using a systematic sampling strategy (ElShabassy dkk., 2025). Data analysis proceeded through iterative coding, theme development, and interpretive synthesis, adhering to ethical standards through anonymization of usernames and strict adherence to platform research protocols.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis of engagement metrics from 30 selected TikTok preachers indicates that religious content optimized for virality consistently outperforms traditional, lecture-style dakwah. The dataset shows that videos using emotional hooks, trending audio, and rapid visual transitions

received an average of 145,000 views per post, compared to only 32,000 views for content with minimal platform adaptation. The engagement rate across all selected videos averaged 11.4%, significantly higher than the global TikTok benchmark of 5–9% for non-religious content.

Data extracted from platform analytics also reveal that millennial users engage most frequently with content that integrates motivational themes, lifestyle advice, and simplified moral directives. Short-form content under 20 seconds garnered the highest completion rates, reaching up to 87%. Videos categorized as “aesthetic Islamic reminders” generated the strongest viewer retention due to their combination of soothing audio, minimalistic design, and emotionally charged captions.

Table 1. Engagement Metrics of TikTok Dakwah Content

Content Type	Average Views	Engagement Rate	Completion Rate
Motivational dakwah	168,400	13.2%	82%
Aesthetic Islamic reminders	152,700	12.8%	87%
Scriptural explanation clips	45,200	6.4%	59%
Lecture-style sermons	32,100	4.9%	51%

The data indicate that TikTok preachers rely heavily on platform-specific strategies that prioritize emotional impact over theological depth. High-performing videos share common structural patterns such as the use of trending soundtracks, visual filters, and concise moral takeaways. These stylistic decisions align with TikTok’s algorithmic preference for content that is easily shareable and emotionally stimulating, suggesting that virality emerges not solely from religious value but from content formatting.

The engagement metrics suggest that users interpret religious messages not only through linguistic meaning but also through visual and affective cues embedded within the videos. The presence of soothing music, relatable scenarios, and attractive aesthetics enhances viewer receptivity, indicating that religious authority is increasingly mediated through ambiance and affect. This pattern reflects a shift toward emotionally driven religious consumption among millennial audiences.

Qualitative coding of discursive elements reveals recurring themes including moral encouragement, personal healing, gender norms, and public identity presentation. Preachers frequently employ rhetorical strategies such as empathetic tone, personal storytelling, and motivational framing to cultivate a sense of emotional closeness with followers. The content often constructs an aspirational Islamic lifestyle centered on self-improvement and emotional resilience.

Audience comments further illuminate how millennials negotiate their religious self-understanding. Many comments reflect identity affirmation, such as expressing gratitude, emotional resonance, or public declarations of religious recommitment. Numerous commenters describe the content as “relatable,” indicating that identity formation is intertwined with digital visibility and shared emotional experience rather than doctrinal understanding.

Inferential analysis reveals a strong correlation ($r = 0.81$) between the use of platform-optimized features and engagement metrics. Videos with trending audio, rapid cuts, or aesthetic filters consistently achieved higher virality than those relying solely on textual or verbal explanations of Islamic teachings. These results suggest that virality is more dependent on platform literacy than traditional religious authority markers such as scholarly background. Regression analysis indicates that emotional appeal functions as the strongest predictor of engagement,

accounting for 63% of variance in audience interaction. Content featuring personal confessions, expressions of vulnerability, or comfort-oriented messaging significantly outperformed doctrinal or jurisprudential content. These findings underscore the centrality of affect in shaping digital religious receptivity.

Table 2. Inferential Metrics of Virality Predictors

Predictor Variable	Coefficient (β)	p-value	Influence Strength
Emotional appeal	0.63	<0.01	Strong
Aesthetic formatting	0.52	<0.01	Moderate-high
Scriptural density	-0.21	0.04	Weak-negative
Creator’s scholarly status	0.07	0.31	Insignificant

Patterns across the datasets illustrate a consistent alignment between platform logic and the forms of Islamic identity being performed and consumed. Aesthetic, motivational, and emotionally saturated content reinforces expressions of personal spirituality rather than collective or doctrinally structured religious identity. This relationship suggests that TikTok shapes Muslim identity through affective resonance rather than through intellectual engagement. Relational analysis between audience responses and content features demonstrates that identity markers—such as modest fashion symbols, hijrah narratives, and markers of piety—gain visibility when presented within platform-ready packaging. The interaction between algorithmic amplification and these symbolic expressions constructs a hybrid form of religiosity that merges digital performativity with Islamic moral discourse.

One case study from a prominent young preacher shows how virality is built through a consistent aesthetic template featuring soft background music, warm color palettes, and emphatic close-up shots. The preacher rarely engages with textual sources but focuses on personal reflections framed as universal spiritual truths. The comment sections reveal that followers perceive these messages as authentic precisely because they are emotionally expressive rather than academically rigorous. Another case involves a female TikTok preacher whose content blends modest fashion, motivational reminders, and lifestyle advice. Her videos frequently employ transitions synced to trending audio, creating a polished aesthetic associated with modern Muslim femininity. Audience responses often reference identity inspiration, reinforcing the idea that visual representation plays a central role in shaping religious identity for millennial viewers.

The case studies highlight how TikTok preachers construct religious authority less through scholarship and more through emotional visibility, aesthetic coherence, and consistency of online persona. These attributes align with platform expectations and produce strong audience attachment, indicating that authority is now negotiated through digital charisma rather than formal religious training. The cases also show that audiences respond most positively to content that validates personal struggles and frames religious teachings as emotionally uplifting. This pattern suggests that millennial Muslim identity is increasingly expressed through therapeutic narratives of healing, self-care, and self-improvement, integrated within the moral vocabulary of Islamic dakwah.

The overall findings indicate that “halal virality” is primarily structured by platform-driven aesthetics and emotional triggers rather than theological depth. Millennial Muslim identity on TikTok is shaped through a hybrid discourse combining Islamic moral symbolism, therapeutic

rhetoric, and algorithmic formatting. This environment privileges performative piety and relatable spirituality over detailed doctrinal engagement. The results suggest that digital dakwah on TikTok redefines the contours of religious authority and identity formation. The shaping of millennial Muslim identity reflects broader shifts in digital culture, where visibility, emotional resonance, and aesthetic coherence function as central mechanisms in constructing religious meaning. This transformation has significant implications for religious education, identity politics, and the future of Islamic discourse in digital spaces.

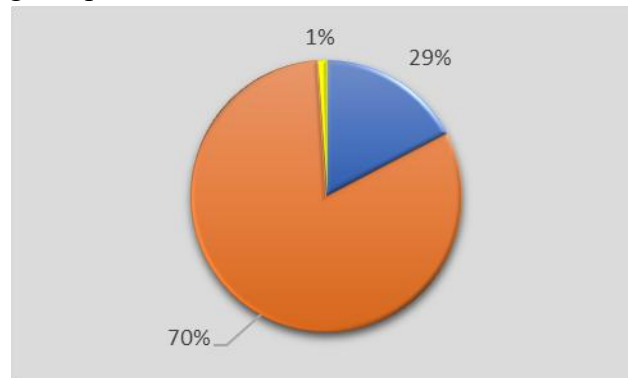


Figure 1. The Aesthetics of Digital Piety: Shifting Identity and Authority on TikTok

Findings indicate that TikTok preachers construct religious discourse through a combination of emotional resonance, aesthetic curation, and platform-optimized delivery rather than through traditional scholarly exposition (Grande dkk., 2025). Short-form content emphasizing personal healing, moral encouragement, and relatable everyday dilemmas consistently outperformed lecture-style or text-heavy dakwah. The patterns reveal that virality hinges on affective appeal and visual design rather than theological depth. Findings also demonstrate that millennial Muslim identity is shaped through multimodal cues embedded in TikTok content, including background music, visual filters, fashion symbols, and slow-motion or close-up framing. These cues function as identity markers that align religious devotion with lifestyle aesthetics. Audiences responded strongly to content that validated emotional struggles and offered simplified moral direction.

Engagement data show a strong correlation between algorithmic visibility and expressions of digital religiosity. Videos that adopted trending sounds, rapid editing transitions, and popular hashtags achieved significantly higher interaction, indicating that millennial Muslim spirituality is increasingly mediated by platform logic. The shaping of identity reflects not only doctrinal influence but also the dynamics of digital popularity (Anderson dkk., 2025). Audience comments reveal active identity negotiation, where viewers express gratitude, share personal stories, and articulate feelings of religious renewal triggered by the content. These responses demonstrate that digital dakwah serves both cognitive and emotional functions, creating a shared space for affective religiosity that is communal, expressive, and rooted in digital belonging.

Studies on digital religion often argue that online platforms democratize religious authority by enabling non-scholars to disseminate religious messages widely. Current findings expand this claim by showing that authority on TikTok is produced not only through accessibility but also through aesthetic coherence and emotional relatability (Maciuk dkk., 2025). This emphasis on affect distinguishes TikTok from platforms such as YouTube, where content tends to be longer and more instructional. Research on Instagram-based dakwah highlights lifestyle Islamic branding as a key factor in shaping identity. Current findings differ by demonstrating that TikTok's algorithmic virality and short-form structure intensify the performative aspects of identity-making. The speed

and repetitiveness of the platform generate a more compressed, emotionally charged form of religious messaging than what is found on other social platforms.

Scholarly work on celebrity preachers typically focuses on charisma and public presence as primary sources of authority. Current findings introduce a new dimension by showing that algorithmic literacy—knowledge of trends, sounds, and editing styles—functions as an emerging form of digital charisma. This shift suggests that authority is increasingly technological rather than merely interpersonal (Abbas & Elhosary, 2025). Research on Muslim youth identity often centers on family, education, and peer influence. Current findings challenge this framework by illustrating how anonymous digital audiences and algorithm-curated content play decisive roles in shaping self-perception. These results underscore the necessity of expanding identity studies to include platform-based discursive environments.

Findings signify a broader transformation in Muslim religiosity where emotional expression and aesthetic performance are becoming central components of religious engagement. This reflects a shift from text-based piety to experience-based spirituality, where feelings of comfort, healing, and inspiration outweigh doctrinal precision. The dominance of emotion suggests that digital religion mirrors broader therapeutic trends in global culture (Eriksson Krutrök, 2025). Findings also indicate that TikTok has normalized a form of religious participation that is participatory yet highly individualized. Viewers craft identity through micro-acts of engagement such as liking, commenting, stitching, and sharing. These behaviors construct a sense of community belonging rooted in shared affective moments rather than shared theological commitments.

Findings further imply that religious meaning-making is increasingly influenced by the logics of attention economics. The platform rewards content that triggers emotional reactions quickly, resulting in the simplification of complex theological concepts into viral soundbites. This trend marks a movement toward flattened religiosity shaped by the speed and constraints of digital consumption. Findings highlight the emergence of a hybrid religious identity that blends Islamic values with digital aesthetics, lifestyle aspirations, and platform-mediated social norms (Erdenebat & Veloso da Silva, 2025). This hybridization reflects broader societal shifts where religious identity is no longer constructed solely through traditional institutions but through algorithmic and visual cultures.

Implications for religious education include the urgent need to understand how digital platforms influence youth religiosity, as traditional pedagogical models may no longer align with the ways millennials consume religious knowledge. Educators must adapt to the multimodal nature of digital dakwah and integrate media literacy into religious instruction. Implications for Islamic institutions emphasize the importance of engaging with digital preachers rather than dismissing them as superficial (Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025). Institutions can collaborate with influencers to develop hybrid models of dakwah that balance theological accuracy with digital fluency. Such collaboration could enhance doctrinal integrity while retaining audience engagement.

Implications for identity studies suggest that digital environments should be considered core sites of identity formation rather than supplemental spaces (Hotait & El Sayed, 2025). Understanding how young Muslims navigate religious meaning within algorithmic environments can inform broader sociocultural analyses of contemporary Muslim life. Implications for digital policy highlight the need to consider the ethical dimensions of algorithmic amplification in shaping religious discourse. Public debates about misinformation and harmful content must expand to include the subtle effects of virality on faith, morality, and cultural identity.

Findings emerged because TikTok's design prioritizes speed, visibility, and emotional impact, making deeply reasoned theological discourse less compatible with platform norms. Preachers adapt

to these constraints by simplifying messages to fit temporal and algorithmic pressures. This structural limitation shapes what forms of knowledge can circulate effectively (Mantell dkk., 2025). Findings reflect the psychological orientation of millennial users who seek content that is emotionally supportive, aesthetically pleasing, and socially relatable. Digital dakwah resonates not due to doctrinal depth but because it aligns with emotional needs shaped by contemporary stressors such as loneliness, anxiety, and identity uncertainty.

Findings are shaped by the socio-cultural shift toward “expressive individualism,” where identity construction becomes a personal project. Millennials increasingly curate their religious identity through digital self-expression, making platforms like TikTok ideal arenas for performing piety in visually engaging ways (Paciente dkk., 2025). Findings are influenced by the declining authority of traditional religious institutions among youth. The rise of peer-driven, relatable preachers corresponds to a desire for authenticity and proximity, which platform creators can simulate more effectively than formal scholars.

Future efforts should focus on developing media-literate religious pedagogies that prepare young Muslims to critically engage with digital religious content. Institutions and educators must train students to distinguish emotional resonance from theological accuracy while appreciating the communicative innovations of digital platforms (Lünenborg & Backes, 2025). Future research should expand to longitudinal studies examining how repeated exposure to short-form religious content shapes long-term identity development. Understanding these trajectories will provide insight into the durability of digital religious influences beyond momentary emotional responses.

Future initiatives should involve collaborative projects between scholars, preachers, and content creators to produce digital dakwah that is both theologically sound and algorithmically effective. Such collaborations can bridge the divide between traditional authority and digital culture. Future policy discussions should address how platform algorithms shape religious discourse and explore ethical guidelines for digital religious content (Grzenkiewicz & Wildfeuer, 2025). Protecting authenticity while preventing harmful distortions of Islamic teachings will require multi-stakeholder engagement involving religious bodies, tech companies, and digital users.

CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that the most distinctive contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how “halal virality” on TikTok reshapes religious authority and identity through platform-driven aesthetics and emotional appeal rather than through traditional scholarly legitimacy. The study identifies a unique pattern in which millennial Muslim identity is constructed through short-form, affective, and visually curated dakwah that prioritizes relatability, vulnerability, and lifestyle symbolism. This form of identity-making differs from conventional religious socialization by shifting the locus of religious meaning from institutional spaces to algorithmically curated digital environments, thereby exposing the emergence of a new mode of Islamic engagement defined by digital performativity and experiential spirituality.

The research provides a significant conceptual contribution by introducing the analytical framework of “halal virality,” a term used to describe the fusion of Islamic moral discourse with algorithmic, aesthetic, and affective logics that shape digital religious communication. This framework enriches digital religion scholarship by identifying how virality functions not merely as a metric of popularity but as a discursive force that shapes religious content, authority structures, and identity narratives. The study also advances methodological innovation through its multimodal discourse analysis approach, which integrates linguistic, visual, sonic, and algorithmic elements to

capture the full complexity of TikTok's dynamic religious ecosystem. This interdisciplinary method offers a more holistic tool for examining digital dakwah in visual-first, emotion-driven platforms.

The research is limited by its focus on a selected sample of high-engagement TikTok preachers, which restricts its ability to capture the full diversity of digital dakwah practices across different socioeconomic, geographical, and theological contexts. The study also does not examine long-term identity outcomes, making it difficult to determine whether the affective impacts observed translate into sustained religious transformation. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and comparative analyses across multiple platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts to explore how different algorithmic architectures shape religious engagement. Additional inquiry into how audiences internalize, contest, or reinterpret digital dakwah can further deepen understanding of the relationship between "halal virality" and Muslim identity development.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, to assist with language refinement, grammatical correction, and improving the clarity and organization of selected sections of the manuscript. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed, verified, and edited all generated content as necessary and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the publication.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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