Television Da'wah as Popular Culture: A Review of the Symbiosis between Religion and Entertainment

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Abstract

This study analyzes how television da'wah in Indonesia is constructed as part of popular culture through the symbiosis of religion and entertainment. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research examines da'wah programs through observation, content analysis, and literature review. The findings indicate that television da'wah has transformed traditional preaching into mass media communication with a wider audience, especially among urban communities and younger generations. Religious messages are combined with popular entertainment elements such as celebrities, religious music, humor, and modern visualization, making them more accessible. However, the dominance of entertainment also carries the risk of producing a shallow understanding of religion, as entertainment aspects tend to overshadow religious substance.

Keywords : elevision da'wah, popular culture, entertainment, media, religion

Introduction
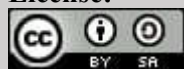
Television holds significant power in shaping public opinion and disseminating social as well as religious values. In this context, television da'wah becomes an important phenomenon reflecting the transformation of Islamic preaching into the realm of popular culture. Da'wah, previously delivered through mosques and majlis taklim (religious assemblies), now shifts to the screen with a format that is more engaging and easily accessible to the wider community. However, an academic issue arises regarding how television da'wah combines religious and entertainment elements without sacrificing the religious substance.

Several studies show that da'wah in mass media often undergoes commodification and banality of meaning

(Heryanto, 2018; Hasan, 2019), where religious messages are presented as part of the entertainment industry and public consumption. A similar phenomenon is seen in the film Waktu Maghrib, which according to Alpianor et al. (2025) successfully conveys religious values through attractive cinematic symbols and atmosphere, yet still presents a challenge between spiritual value and the form of entertainment. This raises the question: to what extent can television da'wah maintain the authenticity of the religious message amidst the pressure of media industry logic?

This research is important to analyze how the communication strategy of television da'wah is constructed as part of popular culture, how entertainment is used as a medium for message delivery, and its impact on the community's religious understanding. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the scholarship of Islamic communication and provide critical insights into the relationship between religion, media, and popular culture in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS (500-1000 words)

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This approach was chosen because the research does not focus on numerical or statistical data, but rather on understanding the meaning, message, and communication strategies contained in da'wah broadcasts on television. In line with Creswell's view (2018), qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups attach to a social or human phenomenon. Thus, this study seeks to reveal in depth how da'wah is delivered through television media and how entertainment elements also influence the transmission of the religious message.

The descriptive method is used to systematically, factually, and accurately portray the phenomenon of da'wah on television. Through this method, the researcher endeavors to capture how da'wah broadcasts are packaged in a popular culture format, and how entertainment elements are integrated with religious values. The researcher does not only focus on describing the content of the broadcasts but also examines how da'wah communication is constructed in the context of modern mass media.

The research objects include various television da'wah programs in Indonesia, both in the form of sermons, talk shows, religious soap operas (sinetron religi), and special Ramadan programs.

These broadcasts were chosen because they feature the practice of da'wah combined with popular entertainment elements, such as the use of religious music, the presence of celebrities, a humorous delivery style, and modern stage settings.

The research subjects encompass parties involved in the production and consumption process of da'wah programs, including the da'i or ustaz (preacher) as the message deliverer, the producer as the program format director, and the audience as the message recipient. Nevertheless, the main focus of the research remains directed at the da'wah broadcasts themselves, while other subjects function as supporting analysis. Program selection was done using purposive sampling technique, considering the relevance of the broadcasts to the research theme—namely programs showing a symbiosis between religion and entertainment and having a high level of popularity.

Data collection processes were carried out through several main techniques. First, non-participant observation, which involves watching and noting television da'wah broadcasts without being involved in the production process. During observation, the researcher noted the sermon theme, the da'i's language

and communication style, the entertainment elements inserted, as well as technical aspects like duration, broadcast schedule, and stage arrangement.

Second, the researcher used content analysis to examine the da'wah messages contained within the broadcasts. Referring to Krippendorff (2019), content analysis is a research technique that allows researchers to make replicable and valid inferences from data based on their context. Through this technique, the researcher identified the main da'wah themes, religious symbols, language style, and strategies for merging entertainment elements with religious messages.

Third, documentation and literature review were conducted to obtain relevant secondary data, whether from books, academic journals, media articles, previous research reports, or official documents from television stations. Documentation also covered collecting broadcast scripts, promotional posters, and television rating data as an overview of audience reception. Furthermore, limited interviews could be conducted optionally with informants such as da'i, producers, or viewers, to strengthen findings from observation and content analysis and provide direct perspectives

from the actors and recipients of the da'wah message.

The data analysis stages include data reduction, which is collecting, sorting, and grouping data based on certain categories such as da'wah theme, form of entertainment, and communication strategy. This is followed by content analysis, to examine da'wah messages in both manifest (apparent meaning) and latent (implied meaning) forms. This analysis is continued with discourse analysis based on Fairclough's (2010) concept of critical discourse analysis, to see how language, rhetoric, and symbols are used in shaping religious discourse in the realm of popular culture. The analysis results are presented in a descriptive narrative format, supplemented by direct quotes, conversation transcripts, and case examples from specific broadcasts.

To maintain the validity of the data, this research uses the technique of source triangulation, which is by comparing results from various data collection methods such as observation, documentation, and literature review. This triangulation ensures that the generated findings are trustworthy and have high validity.

This research was conducted by examining da'wah broadcasts aired by Indonesian national television. The research timing was adjusted to the period when da'wah broadcasts are more intensively aired, such as the month of Ramadan or other religious seasons. Since the data sources come from television broadcasts and online documentation, the research can be conducted both online and offline, without specific physical location restrictions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Television Da'wah Programs in Indonesia

Observations indicate that Indonesian television plays a significant role in bringing Islamic preaching (da'wah) into the public sphere. Since the 2000s, private television stations have increasingly featured religious programs as part of their main content, particularly during the month of Ramadan. These programs have developed in various formats, not limited to traditional sermons but also including religious soap operas, talk shows, reality programs, and religious music concerts.

Examples of these include:

Sermon programs such as Hikmah Fajar (RCTI), Damai Indonesiaku (TV One), and Islam Itu Indah (Trans TV).

Religious talk shows like Mamah dan Aa Beraksi (Indosiar), which feature

direct interaction between the ustadzah and the studio audience.

Religious soap operas such as Para Pencari Tuhan (SCTV) and Hidayah (Trans TV), which use dramatic storytelling to convey moral and Islamic values.

Religious music programs such as Ramadan concerts broadcast by RCTI, Global TV, or SCTV, combining brief religious messages with performances by popular Islamic musicians.

Through these diverse formats, television has succeeded in transforming da'wah from something traditionally viewed as formal and rigid into an entertaining medium accessible to all audiences.

The Entertainment Packaging Pattern in Television Da'wah

Content analysis reveals that entertainment elements are inseparable from da'wah programs on television. Several dominant patterns emerge:

1. Celebrity Personalization

Many programs feature well-known public figures or celebrities, either as hosts or guest stars. Their presence attracts viewers who might not normally be interested in religious content. For instance, Para Pencari Tuhan involves senior actors and comedians, integrating religious messages into everyday entertainment.

2. Humor and Conversational Language

Television preachers tend to use informal, humorous, and relatable language that connects easily with audiences. A clear example is Mamah Dedeh in Mamah dan Aa Beraksi, who often uses spontaneous humor to ease the atmosphere, making both studio and home audiences entertained while still receiving moral lessons.

3. Use of Religious Music

Music plays an essential role in television da'wah, ranging from modern shalawat to popular religious songs. It is often used as an opening, transition, or closing segment. In this way, religious messages are strengthened by the emotional and aesthetic appeal that music provides.

4. Modern Visual Presentation

Television makes use of stage design, lighting, graphic effects, and modern attire to create a dynamic impression. This makes religious programs more appealing to younger audiences. For example, Islam Itu Indah presents a bright studio design, vibrant visuals, and casually dressed hosts who still maintain modesty.

Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Audiences

Based on the analysis, several strategies are employed by television da'wah programs to attract and retain viewers:

1. Contextualization of Messages

The messages delivered are connected to contemporary issues such as youth lifestyles, social media use, and modern family challenges. This relevance helps make da'wah feel closer to the everyday experiences of the audience.

2. Audience Segmentation

Each program targets specific audience segments. For example, Mamah dan Aa Beraksi is popular among housewives, Islam Itu Indah appeals to urban and youth audiences, while religious soap operas like Para Pencari Tuhan are designed for family viewing.

3. Interactivity

Some programs allow direct interaction through phone calls, SMS, or social media. Viewers can ask questions, which are then answered by the ustadz or ustadzah in the studio. This interactivity creates a sense of closeness between the preacher and the audience.

4. Collaboration with the Entertainment Industry

Television da'wah operates within the entertainment industry framework, integrating sponsorships, advertisements, and branding as part of its sustainability strategy. This demonstrates how da'wah has adapted to the logic of the television market.

Case Examples of Television Da'wah Programs

To clarify these findings, several examples of da'wah programs are highlighted:

1.Mamah dan Aa Beraksi (Indosiar)

This program combines religious lectures with interactive dialogue. Its main feature lies in Mamah Dedeh's direct, humorous communication style and her responsiveness to audience questions. The format successfully attracts household viewers and brings da'wah closer to daily life.

2.Para Pencari Tuhan (SCTV)

A long-running religious soap opera broadcast every Ramadan since 2007, lasting for more than ten seasons. Combining comedy, family drama, and moral lessons, it serves as a successful

example of the symbiosis between religion and entertainment on television.

3. Islam Itu Indah (Trans TV)

Hosted by popular preachers in a relaxed style, this program targets younger audiences. The inclusion of celebrity guests and religious music gives da'wah a modern and refreshing tone, making it easily accepted by urban viewers.

Synthesis of Findings

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that television has constructed da'wah as part of popular culture. By merging religious messages with entertainment values, television has made da'wah more accessible and engaging to the wider public.

However, the dominance of entertainment elements also presents challenges. On one hand, television da'wah effectively reaches large and diverse audiences. On the other hand, there is a potential risk of commercialization, trivialization, and the reduction of spiritual values into mere entertainment.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that television da'wah in Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation by entering the realm of popular culture. Television is not just a medium for conveying religious messages, but also an entertainment arena that blends religious values with the logic of the media industry. Da'wah programs packaged through sermons, talk shows, religious soap operas, or religious music concerts are able to present Islamic messages in a format that is more engaging, light, and aligned with the tastes of modern society. Communication strategies using humor, religious music, simple language, and the presence of celebrities successfully expand the audience reach, especially among the younger generation and urban communities. However, there is ambivalence: television expands access to da'wah, but simultaneously presents the risk of commodification and the reduction of religious substance. Therefore, a balance between the religious message and entertainment elements must be maintained.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on these findings, television producers are expected to be more cautious in packaging da'wah programs by positioning entertainment as a supporting element, not the main core. Innovative program formats are still needed, but must be in line with efforts to maintain the

essence of da'wah so it does not dissolve into commercial interests alone.

Television da'i or ustadz also need to maintain the purity of da'wah by utilizing simple language, humor, and religious music as supporting tools that reinforce the message, not replace it. Creativity and adaptation to popular culture remain important, but must be based on authentic Islamic values.

In addition, academics and researchers are encouraged to continue conducting in-depth studies on the influence of television da'wah on community religious behavior. Interdisciplinary research combining communication, sociology, and popular culture can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between media and religion.

The government and broadcasting institutions also need to establish firmer regulations in governing da'wah content, so that religious broadcasts are not just a race for ratings, but also a means of quality public education. Thus, television da'wah can continue to develop as a medium for spreading religious values without losing its substantial meaning.

Finally, the community as an audience is expected to develop a critical attitude in responding to television da'wah. Religious broadcasts presented in an entertainment format should be viewed as an initial entry point to understanding religion, not as the sole source of knowledge. In-depth understanding still needs to be gained through direct study, literature, and formal education, so that television da'wah can be utilized positively without diminishing the quality of faith and the internalization of Islamic values.

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