



SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF DA'WAH CONTENT IN DIGITAL PAINTING ART: A STUDY OF THE INSTAGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT @_ZUKKK

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the construction of the meaning of da'wah in digital painting artworks published through the Instagram account @_zukkk using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This study is motivated by the transformation of da'wah in the digital era, where religious messages are increasingly conveyed through visual media that align with the communication characteristics of the millennial and Generation Z generations. This study uses a qualitative approach with a semiotic analysis method that maps meaning at three levels, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The research data is in the form of uploaded digital artworks that display a representation of a Muslim performing a bowing movement under a large tree, with the surrounding natural elements depicted as bowing as well. The results show that at the denotative level, the artwork represents the practice of prayer as a form of ritual obedience. At the connotative level, the visualization builds the meaning of spiritual harmony between humans and nature in submission to Allah. Meanwhile, at the mythical level, this artwork constructs an ideological narrative about the cosmological submission of the entire universe to the Creator. This study concludes that digital painting serves not only as an aesthetic expression but also as an effective and contextual visual da'wah medium in the social media era. These findings contribute to the development of digital da'wah communication studies by emphasizing the role of visual art as an adaptive, reflective, and relevant da'wah strategy within contemporary visual culture.

Keywords: Digital preaching, semiotics, digital painting, Instagram, @_zukkk

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about fundamental changes in societal communication patterns, including in the delivery of religious messages. Social media no longer merely functions as an information channel but has become a space for the production of meaning, symbolic interaction, and the formation of new religious experiences. In the context of Islamic da'wah, this transformation demands a

communication approach that adapts to the characteristics of digital audiences, particularly millennials and Generation Z, who are more responsive to visual messages than lengthy verbal narratives (Rohim, 2020; Amin & Setiawan, 2021). This situation has given rise to various forms of digital da'wah that emphasize visual creativity as a primary strategy for conveying Islamic messages.

Instagram, as a visual-based platform, plays a strategic role in contemporary da'wah practices. Instagram's characteristics, which emphasize images, illustrations, and visual design, enable religious messages to be conveyed concisely yet meaningfully. Several studies have shown that visual communication has high persuasive power because it can shape perceptions, evoke emotions, and instill values more effectively than solely text-based communication (Faridah, 2022; Nugroho, 2020). Therefore, digital painting on social media can be understood not only as aesthetic expression but also as a potential medium for da'wah communication.

However, most studies on digital da'wah still focus on analyzing textual content, online lectures, or verbal rhetorical strategies, while studies on visual art-based da'wah are relatively limited. Yet, digital art has a complex symbolic character and contains layered meanings that cannot always be understood literally. From a visual communication and semiotic perspective, digital artworks are visual texts that convey denotative, connotative, and even ideological messages that can shape how audiences interpret religious teachings (Sobur, 2019; Yusof & Hamzah, 2020). This limited research indicates a research gap in the study of digital da'wah communication.

Roland Barthes's semiotic approach is relevant to fill this gap. Barthes emphasized that signs do not stop at denotative meanings but also carry connotative and mythical meanings that function to construct certain ideologies in society (Barthes, 2018). Thus, digital Islamic painting art not only presents religious illustrations but also constructs symbolic narratives about the relationship between humans, nature, and God. In line with Eco's (2019) view, visual texts are open-ended, allowing for diverse interpretations influenced by the audience's social, cultural, and spiritual backgrounds.

The Instagram account @_zukkk is an interesting representation of this visual da'wah phenomenon. This account consistently displays digital paintings with Islamic nuances, employing a soft, symbolic, and reflective aesthetic approach. The works displayed do not emphasize explicit verbal da'wah, but instead rely on the power of visual symbols to build a spiritual experience for the audience. This phenomenon reflects a paradigm shift in da'wah from an instructive model to a persuasive and contemplative model, more in keeping with the visual communication culture of a digital society (Hidayat, 2021; Rahman, 2023).

This research is based on three main theories: Visual Communication Theory, Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory, and Da'wah Theory. Visual Communication Theory is used to analyze how visual elements, such as color, composition, and form, play a role in conveying messages and meaning to audiences. Through this theory, @_zukkk's digital work is understood as a form of visual communication that utilizes aesthetic symbols to convey subtle and meaningful spiritual messages.

From the perspective of Visual Communication Theory, @_zukkk's work demonstrates the use of harmonious and symbolic visual elements to reinforce spiritual messages. The choice of soft colors, balanced compositions, and symbolic forms with religious nuances

not only provides aesthetic beauty but also serves as a medium for conveying divine values. This demonstrates that digital artwork can function dually: as artistic expression and as a means of spiritual communication.

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory is used to unravel the layers of meaning in visual works through three levels: denotative, connotative, and mythical. Analysis based on this theory shows that the work constructs a cosmological myth that represents the view that the entire universe is subject to God's power. Thus, the visual work not only displays aesthetic aspects but also contains a profound theological message.

Meanwhile, through Roland Barthes's Semiotic Theory, the work can be interpreted through three layers of meaning. Denotatively, the painting depicts natural elements and symbolic forms that imply serenity. At the connotative level, the visual depicts the harmonious relationship between humans and nature as God's creations. Meanwhile, at the mythical level, a cosmological meaning is found that affirms that the entire universe is subject to and obedient to God's power. Thus, this work not only conveys an aesthetic message but also constructs a strong spiritual narrative.

Da'wah Theory serves as the foundation for understanding the process of conveying Islamic messages through digital media. This theory explains that da'wah is not only carried out through lectures or texts but can also be conveyed through creative media such as digital art. In the context of this research, digital art is seen as an innovative, participatory da'wah medium that is relevant to the characteristics of audiences in the digital age. Furthermore, using the theory of da'wah (Islamic propagation), @_zukkk's work can be understood as a form of contemporary da'wah utilizing digital media. Digital art provides a new means of creatively and nonverbally disseminating Islamic values. The da'wah message is conveyed not through words, but through visual symbols that inspire and awaken the audience's spiritual awareness. This reinforces the finding that da'wah in the digital era can be conducted in a participatory manner and adapt to technological developments and the visual culture of modern society.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the meaning of da'wah in the digital paintings on the Instagram account @_zukkk using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach. Specifically, this research seeks to uncover how da'wah messages are constructed through three layers of meaning denotation, connotation, and myth and how visual art functions as an effective da'wah medium in the digital era. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of digital da'wah communication studies as well as practical contributions for da'i, educators, and content creators in utilizing visual media as a means of conveying Islamic messages that are relevant to contemporary visual culture.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive design, focusing on the symbolic and ideological meanings contained in digital paintings as visual texts for Islamic propagation. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for in-depth analysis of the meaning, context, and construction of religious messages that cannot be measured numerically (Moleong, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research does not aim to generalize the findings, but rather to contextually understand how Islamic propagation messages are constructed through digital visual media.

The analytical method used is Roland Barthes's semiotics, which views visual works as a system of signs with three layers of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. This approach is relevant for uncovering the literal, symbolic, and ideological meanings of Islamic propagation constructed through visual representations (Barthes, 2018; Sobur, 2019). Within this framework, digital paintings are understood not merely as aesthetic expressions but as cultural texts that represent Islamic values and construct spiritual meanings.

The research object focused on digital artworks uploaded to the Instagram account @_zukkk. The unit of analysis in this study was a single primary artwork representing the act of worship (rukuk) with natural elements symbolically displayed. The selection of these artworks was based on the following considerations: (1) the strength of the prominent religious symbol; (2) visual consistency with the account's da'wah theme; and (3) the artwork's relevance to the research objective of examining the harmony of humans, nature, and submission to God. The primary data consisted of digital artwork visuals, while secondary data was obtained from scientific literature relevant to digital da'wah, visual communication, Islamic art, and semiotics (Hidayat, 2021; Faridah, 2022).

Data collection techniques included digital observation, documentation, and library research. Digital observation involved systematically observing artworks uploaded to the Instagram account @_zukkk to identify visual elements, symbols, colors, gestures, and presentation context. Documentation was carried out by saving screenshots of the artworks analyzed as material for the visual study. Literature review was used to strengthen the theoretical framework and analytical interpretation through references to relevant books and scientific articles (Creswell, 2018; Moleong, 2019).

The data analysis procedure was carried out in several stages. First, visual sign identification, which involves inventorying the main visual elements in digital artworks. Second, denotative meaning analysis, which involves describing the literal meaning of directly visible signs. Third, connotative meaning analysis, which involves interpreting symbolic meanings related to cultural values, emotions, and religious experiences. Fourth, myth analysis, to uncover the ideology or narrative of da'wah (Islamic preaching) constructed through the relationship between humans, nature, and God (Barthes, 2018; Eco, 2019).

To ensure data validity and accurate interpretation, this study employed theory and source triangulation. Theory triangulation was conducted by linking the results of the semiotic analysis to theories of visual communication and digital da'wah, while source triangulation was conducted by comparing the analysis findings with previous research and relevant literature. This step is crucial to minimize subjectivity in interpretation and increase the credibility of research findings (Moleong, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). With these methodological procedures, this research is expected to produce a systematic, valid, and academically accountable analysis.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

General Description of the Research Object

The object of analysis in this study is a digital artwork uploaded to the Instagram account @_zukkk, which depicts a Muslim performing a bowing motion under a large tree, with

surrounding plant elements visualized as bowing as well. This artwork was uploaded within the context of visual da'wah (Islamic preaching) that utilizes Instagram as a platform for distributing aesthetically-based religious messages. The choice of Instagram is significant because this medium places visuals at the center of communication, so the da'wah message is conveyed not through lengthy verbal narratives, but rather through suggestive and reflective symbols and image compositions (Faridah, 2022; Nugroho, 2020).



Figure 1. A Muslim is performing the bowing movement under a large tree, with plant elements around him.

Thematically, this digital artwork conveys a message of submission and obedience in prayer, represented through the bowing gesture as a symbol of human humility before God. The presence of natural elements such as trees and plants depicted as bowing as well reinforces the theme of spiritual harmony between humans and God's creation. This theme aligns with the character of contemporary da'wah, which emphasizes not only ritual aspects but also the ecological and cosmological dimensions of Islamic teachings (Rahayu & Putra, 2022). Thus, this work conveys more than just individual messages of worship but also articulates a broader spiritual relationship between humans, nature, and God.

The selection of this work as the primary unit of analysis was based on methodological and substantive considerations. Methodologically, the work possesses a richness of visual symbols that permits a comprehensive application of semiotic analysis at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. Substantively, this work represents the visual style and da'wah approach consistently displayed by the @_zukkk account, namely non-verbal da'wah that relies on the power of symbols and aesthetics to build the audience's spiritual experience. In semiotic-based qualitative research, selecting a unit of analysis that is rich in meaning and relevant to the research objectives is crucial for producing in-depth and meaningful interpretations (Barthes, 2018; Sobur, 2019).

Within the context of the visual da'wah ecosystem on Instagram, the digital artwork of @_zukkk occupies a unique position compared to other da'wah content, which tends to be textual or rhetorical. This account does not feature sermons, explicit verse quotations, or

direct normative calls, but rather conveys da'wah messages through a contemplative visual approach. This approach reflects a shift in da'wah strategies on social media, from instructive communication patterns to persuasive and affective communication patterns that better align with the visual culture of the digital generation (Hidayat, 2021; Amin & Setiawan, 2021).

Thus, the digital artwork analyzed in this study can be understood as a representation of contemporary visual da'wah that utilizes art as a medium for religious communication. This work's position within the Instagram ecosystem is not merely as aesthetic content, but as a visual da'wah text that functions to build spiritual awareness through symbols, visual harmony, and implicit narratives. Understanding the context, theme, and position of this work is an important foundation before analyzing the meaning, so that subsequent semiotic readings cannot be separated from the reality of the media, visual culture, and the underlying goals of da'wah (Eco, 2019; Rahman, 2023).

Denotative Meaning Analysis

At the denotative level, the digital painting analyzed displays several key visual elements that are immediately recognizable to the observer. These elements include the human figure, the bowing gesture, natural elements such as trees and surrounding plants, and a visual composition that places the human figure at the center of attention. The human figure is depicted wearing Muslim attire and in a bowed position, which visually refers to one of the movements in the prayer ritual. At this level, visual signs are understood as they appear, without involving symbolic or ideological interpretation (Barthes, 2018).

The human figure in this work denotatively represents a Muslim performing his prayers. There are no detailed facial expressions or emphasis on specific personal identities, so the figure can be understood as a general representation of a worshipper. This simple, non-individualistic depiction of the figure reinforces its visual function as a representation of religious practice, rather than a personal portrait. In visual communication studies, the human figure is often used as a primary signifier to directly indicate specific social or ritual activities (Nugroho, 2020).

The ruku (bowing) gesture depicted in this work literally represents one of the pillars of prayer: a bowed body position with a straight back and a bowed head. At the denotative level, this gesture can be understood as a physical action within the series of prayers performed by Muslims. Ruku (bowing) is a ritual with a clear sequence and procedure in the practice of prayer, so the visualization of this gesture directly refers to formal worship activities without requiring additional explanation (Sobur, 2019).

Natural elements present in this work include a large tree and surrounding plants, which are visually depicted leaning or bowing. Denotatively, these elements can be understood as the open natural setting where the human figures perform their prayers. Trees and plants serve as a visual setting, indicating that prayer takes place in a natural space, rather than within an enclosed building like a mosque. The presence of natural elements as a backdrop literally demonstrates the open and natural context of the prayer space (Rahayu & Putra, 2022).

In terms of composition and color, this work utilizes a relatively simple visual arrangement, with a balance between the human figures and the natural setting. The

human figures are placed centrally, while natural elements surround them without dominating the main focus. The colors used tend to be soft and natural, resembling those commonly found in natural environments. Denotatively, this composition and color serve to highlight the objects and activities depicted, so that the audience can easily recognize that this work represents the practice of prayer as a Muslim religious ritual (Faridah, 2022).

Connotative Meaning Analysis

At the connotative level, the bowing gesture depicted in this digital artwork is not only understood as a physical movement during prayer, but also carries symbolic meaning as an expression of humility and spiritual obedience of a servant to God. Bowing visually depicts a bowed body position, which culturally in Islamic tradition represents submission, obedience, and acknowledgment of God's greatness. From a semiotic perspective, this bodily gesture functions as an emotional and spiritual marker that connects the physical action with the inner meaning of worship (Barthes, 2018; Sobur, 2019).

Connotative meaning is also constructed through the presence of natural elements, particularly trees and plants, which are visualized as bowing. Symbolically, these natural elements no longer function merely as a visual backdrop but as representations of created beings in a relationship of submission to God. In the study of Islamic visual art and culture, nature is often understood as a sign of the Divine presence, reflecting the order and harmony of creation (Rahayu & Putra, 2022). Thus, the natural elements in this work connote the unity between humans and the environment within a shared spiritual orientation.

The relationship between the human bowing gesture and the natural elements that also bow, constructs a spiritual harmony between humans and nature in the context of worship. At the connotative level, this work conveys the message that worship does not exist as a purely individual activity, but rather as part of a cosmic order that involves all of creation. The visual harmony created by the harmony of human and natural movements reinforces the idea that religious practices in Islam have interconnected ecological and cosmological dimensions (Yusof & Hamzah, 2020).

This connotative meaning becomes even more significant when linked to the audience's religious experience in the digital space. Social media audiences, particularly millennials and Generation Z, tend to respond to religious messages conveyed through emotional and reflective visuals rather than through dogmatic narratives. Through the harmonious symbols of bowing and nature, this work has the potential to evoke affective spiritual experiences in the audience, such as a sense of calm, self-awareness, and reflection on the deeper meaning of worship (Faridah, 2022; Amin & Setiawan, 2021).

In the context of digital da'wah (Islamic outreach), the connotative meanings constructed through this digital painting demonstrate the effectiveness of a visual communication approach as a means of conveying Islamic values. The da'wah message is conveyed implicitly through symbols and aesthetics, so the audience does not feel lectured but is instead invited to experience and interpret the message personally. This approach aligns with contemporary da'wah principles that emphasize persuasive and participatory aspects and is relevant to the visual communication culture of the digital society (Hidayat, 2021; Nugroho, 2020).

Analysis of the Meaning of Myth

At the mythical level, the digital artwork analyzed constructs a narrative of cosmological submission, namely the idea that the entire universe is in a state of submission and obedience to God's will. The visualization of humans bowing down alongside the elements of nature also bowing down is no longer simply understood as an individual or relational symbol, but rather as a construction of meaning that naturalizes the theological belief that submission is a universal condition of all creation. Within Roland Barthes's semiotic framework, myth works by transforming ideological values into something seemingly natural and unquestioned, so that the message of da'wah is accepted as a "natural" and "natural" truth (Barthes, 2018).

The myth constructed through this work represents Islamic ideology regarding the integral relationship between God, humanity, and nature. Humans are not positioned as the center of the universe separate from the environment, but rather as part of a cosmic order that is equally submissive to God. This relationship affirms the principle of monotheism as an ideological foundation, where all creation is oriented toward servitude. In religious communication studies, this type of narrative serves to strengthen a holistic Islamic worldview, viewing spiritual, social, and ecological life as an inseparable whole (Sobur, 2019; Yusof & Hamzah, 2020).

Through the medium of digital art, this cosmological myth is conveyed not as verbal doctrine, but through a reflective visual experience. Digital art allows the ideology of da'wah to be presented subtly and persuasively, without rigid normative language. In this context, art functions as a medium for shaping cosmological awareness, namely the awareness that human worship resonates with all of creation. This awareness also intersects with Islamic ecological discourse, which positions nature as part of God's trust that must be respected and protected (Rahayu & Putra, 2022; Hidayat, 2021).

The visual myth constructed in this work also plays a crucial role in framing non-verbal da'wah in the digital age. Amid a social media culture characterized by speed, fragmentation, and visual dominance, myth becomes an effective strategy for conveying ideological messages concisely yet profoundly. The audience is not invited to read theological arguments, but rather to "feel" the message of submission and the unity of creation through harmonious visuals. This aligns with findings from digital da'wah studies that show that affective and visual approaches are more effective in building audience spiritual engagement than instructive approaches (Amin & Setiawan, 2021; Faridah, 2022).

Thus, the analysis of the meaning of myth in the digital artwork @_zukkk demonstrates an analytical contribution that goes beyond mere symbolic description. This work not only visualizes worship but also constructs a da'wah ideology that affirms Islam as a cosmological teaching that unites God, humanity, and nature in a single spiritual order. Through digital art, this myth is disseminated and reproduced in the digital public sphere, making Instagram a new arena for the formation of religious meaning and awareness. These findings strengthen the position of visual art as a strategic medium for contemporary da'wah, capable of conveying Islamic ideology in an adaptive, reflective, and relevant manner to the visual culture of modern society (Eco, 2019; Nugroho, 2020).

Visual Sufism and Contemporary Islamic Spirituality on the Instagram Account @_ZUKKK

A semiotic analysis of the collection of works on the Instagram account @_ZUKKK reveals iconographic and cognitive patterns consistent with Sufi aesthetics and contemporary Islamic spiritual practices (Romadlany & Billah, 2023). Visually, these works frequently employ recurring motifs: circles and spirals (symbols of unity and cosmic rotation), plays of light and color gradients alluding to tajalli (manifestations of Divine light) (Askarizad, He, & Ardejani, 2022), and calligraphic abstractions that render sacred texts not merely verbal messengers but visual elements manifesting presence. Geometric patterns and arabesques are reduced to minimal forms that function as indices pointing to Divine order, rather than naturalistic imitations. Semiotically, these elements act as signifiers that signify inner experiences: the alienation of the ego, the search for divine contact, and the spiritual journey toward *fana'/baq'a*.

On a connotative level, the combination of fragmented calligraphy and predominantly empty space creates the effect of a visual meditation space: negative space becomes a "place" for the reader to contemplate, while digital strokes and textures act as markers of the dynamics of the soul (Fauziah, 2025). The visual narrative is often composed episodically of fragments of text (quotes of *qira'ah* or abbreviated *dhikr* phrases), natural symbols (water, birds, light), and interconnected circular shapes, so that each post functions as a "fragment of Sufi experience" that can be read repeatedly. From Barthes' perspective, the myth constructed by this account is the modern myth of "art as a vehicle for human closeness to God"; this myth naturalizes the idea that contemporary aesthetics and traditional spiritual practices can merge in digital visual language.

In terms of *da'wah* strategy, this content demonstrates a non-dogmatic and impressive *da'wah* approach: *da'wah* is not conveyed through lengthy theological arguments but through aesthetic affectivity that invites emotional resonance and inner experience (Nuha & Sholeh, 2024). Semiotically, this represents a code shift from "teaching" to "experience" (a denotative-connotative-affective code). This is relevant in the context of social media because suggestive visual forms more easily trigger brief and repeated reflections in users who scroll quickly, making it easier for *da'wah* to infiltrate users' private spaces as moments of pause.

The implications of this research indicate that the Sufi aesthetics of @_ZUKKK serve a dual function: (1) as a means of representing Sufi values (symbols, calligraphy, geometry), and (2) as a performative practice that creates a contemporary religious experience through digital media. Methodologically, these findings emphasize the importance of reading *da'wah* digital artwork not merely at the level of text/content, but also at the visual configuration of space, the rhythm of publication, and the arrangement of elements that shape the receptive experience.

Finally, this research demonstrates that digital painting is not merely an aesthetic product, but also an ideological tool that can be used to build religious awareness. Through semiotic analysis, this work presents diverse layers of meaning: from a literal representation of bowing, a symbol of human harmony with nature, to a myth about universal submission. The message of *da'wah* contained in the work not only strengthens the understanding of prayer as the primary act of worship, but also reminds the audience

that human worship is always connected to the rhythm of the cosmos that submits to God. Thus, digital art can be seen as a strategic and relevant da'wah medium, capable of bridging Islamic teachings with the visual culture of modern society.

4. CONCLUSION

This research reflects that da'wah in the digital era no longer relies solely on verbal narratives and formal lectures, but has evolved toward visual communication that is symbolic and experiential. Through semiotic analysis, the digital artwork displayed on the Instagram account @_zukkk demonstrates that da'wah messages can be effectively constructed through subtle, contemplative, and emotional visual language. Digital art, in this context, functions not only as a medium for conveying messages but also as a space for spiritual reflection, allowing audiences to experience the meaning of worship in a more personal and profound way.

Reflectively, the findings of this research demonstrate that worship practices visualized through digital art can foster cosmological awareness, where the relationship between God, humanity, and nature is understood as a spiritual unity. The visual representation of human submission in harmony with nature presents a meaning of worship that transcends formal rituals and embraces ethical and ecological awareness. This confirms that visual da'wah goes beyond simply conveying teachings but also fosters a new perspective on religiosity that is more inclusive, reflective, and contextualized to the challenges of modern life.

Thus, this research provides a conceptual contribution to understanding digital painting as a contemporary da'wah practice that adapts to the visual culture of digital society. Reflecting on these findings opens up opportunities for the development of non-verbal da'wah that is more creative, humanistic, and oriented towards the spiritual experience of the audience. Going forward, a visual arts-based da'wah approach has the potential to become an important strategy in bridging Islamic values with the dynamics of digital media, while also encouraging further exploration of the roles of art, technology, and spirituality in modern religious communication.

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