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## TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC AESTHETIC SYMBOLS IN CONTEMPORARY DA'WAH MEDIA: A HERMENEUTIC REVIEW OF GADAMER AND RICOEUR

### TRANSFORMASI SIMBOL ESTETIKA ISLAM DALAM MEDIA DAKWAH KONTEMPORER: TINJAUAN HERMENEUTIK ATAS PEMIKIRAN GADAMER DAN RICOEUR

Asep Deny Firdaus<sup>1</sup>

*Universitas Islam Nusantara Bandung, Indonesia*

adenyfirdaus@gmail.com

Helmawati<sup>2</sup>

*Universitas Islam Nusantara Bandung, Indonesia*

helmawati.dr@gmail.com

Iyad Suryadi<sup>3</sup>

*Universitas Islam Nusantara Bandung, Indonesia*

Iyadsuryadi@uninus.ac.id

**ABSTRACT:** Between traditional symbols and digital visual innovation. Using the hermeneutic approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, this study explores the dynamics of meaning that emerge from the interaction between Islamic visual texts and the modern socio-cultural context. Data were obtained through observation of digital-based da'wah artworks and visual documentation on various media platforms, then analysed using the fusion of horizons and interpretative arc models. The results show that symbols such as calligraphy, geometry, and arabesque have transformed meaning through the digital medium without losing their theological value. This reinterpretation not only expands the aesthetic horizons of da'wah but also increases the relevance of Islamic messages for the digital generation. However, integrating artistic form and theological constraints remains a significant challenge in maintaining authenticity. This study emphasises the importance of collaboration between artists, scholars, and academics to develop innovative, communicative, and spiritually valid models of da'wah art.

**Keywords:** Islamic Aesthetics; Da'wah Art; Hermeneutics; Visual Reinterpretation.

**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana seni da'wah kontemporer menafsirkan kembali estetika Islam melalui dialektika antara simbol-simbol tradisional dan inovasi visual digital. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutik Hans-Georg Gadamer dan Paul Ricoeur, studi ini mengeksplorasi dinamika makna yang muncul dari interaksi antara teks visual Islam dan konteks sosial-budaya modern. Data diperoleh melalui observasi karya seni da'wah berbasis digital dan dokumentasi visual di berbagai platform media, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model fusi horizon dan busur interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa simbol-simbol seperti kaligrafi, geometri, dan arabesque mengalami transformasi makna melalui medium digital tanpa kehilangan nilai teologisnya. Reinterpretasi ini tidak hanya memperluas cakrawala estetika da'wah, tetapi juga meningkatkan relevansi pesan-pesan Islam bagi generasi digital. Namun, integrasi antara bentuk artistik dan batasan teologis tetap menjadi tantangan utama dalam menjaga keaslian. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya kolaborasi antara seniman, cendekiawan, dan akademisi untuk mengembangkan model seni da'wah yang inovatif, komunikatif, dan secara spiritual valid.

**Kata kunci:** Estetika Islam; Seni Da'wah; Hermeneutika; Reinterpretasi Visual.

## A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic aesthetics is a field of study that has never been free from the dialectic between spiritual values and artistic innovation. This phenomenon reflects the growing tension between religious tradition and modern artistic expression. In the context of contemporary da'wah art, this tension even catalyses the formation of a new discourse that combines symbolic, aesthetic, and theological elements more dynamically. The emergence of new approaches to delivering da'wah messages through visual works indicates that interpretations of Islamic aesthetic values are now focused on the heritage of the past and oriented towards a more inclusive future of religious communication.<sup>1</sup>

In an era of globalisation marked by technological advances and digital media, the transformation of da'wah strategies has undergone significant developments. Visual aesthetics acts as a key medium in establishing effective communication between religious messages and the wider public.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary studies show that combining traditional elements with modern expressions in da'wah art can create a visual experience that is not only engaging but also spiritually profound. However, the process poses its own challenges, namely maintaining the authenticity of Islamic values from potential distortion of meaning due to excessive aesthetic innovation.<sup>3</sup>

The discourse on Islamic aesthetics in da'wah art is also closely related to the criticism of theological conservatism that is often considered to hinder the development of religious art. Even so, modern theologians emphasise the importance of caution in reinterpreting aesthetics so as not to cause ambiguity in conveying Islamic moral values. Da'wah art should not only be a medium of artistic expression but also an educative and transformational instrument for spreading the full teachings of Islam, both theologically and ethically.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, aesthetics in the Islamic tradition has strong roots in the principles of order, symbolism, and transcendence. Classical Islamic art, such as calligraphy, arabesques, and mosque architecture, manifests a concept of beauty that is inseparable

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<sup>1</sup> Laili Husniyah and Ahmad Sodik, 'Sunan Kalijaga and the Aesthetics of Dakwah Nusantara', *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 6, no. 1 (2024): 88-101.

<sup>2</sup> Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *The Art of Tawhid: The Essence and Expression of Islamic Aesthetics* (Yogyakarta: Benteng Budaya, 1999), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Lintang Wulan and Ratih Handayani, 'Islamic Music in the Context of Modern Da'wah', *Jurnal Islamika* 18, no. 2 (2020): 134-48.

<sup>4</sup> M Meifitriadi, S Hasanah, and R Nurhadi, 'Convergence of Spiritual Values and Visual Forms in Islamic Da'wah', *Journal of Da'wah and Communication* 16, no. 1 (2022): 77-95, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jdk.v16i1.2022>.

from spiritual values.<sup>5</sup> In practice, these elements function as visual representations of the principles of tawhid and holiness. However, in the context of contemporary da'wah art, these symbols are often reinterpreted with a more contextualised visual approach, following the social and cultural dynamics of modern society.<sup>6</sup>

The use of digital media in the art of da'wah has opened up new opportunities for aesthetic expressions of Islam that are more interactive and responsive to audience needs. However, it also poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Islamic message conveyed. The interactivity of digital media allows for flexibility in message delivery, but at the same time demands rigour in maintaining congruence between form and meaning.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this research emphasises the importance of integration between visual innovation and theological boundaries as the main conditions for the success of authentic and transformative da'wah art.<sup>8</sup>

This research adopts a hermeneutic approach to explore the layers of meaning contained in Islamic aesthetic symbols used in contemporary da'wah art. This interpretation process not only relies on visual aspects, but also considers the normative framework of religious texts as well as oral traditions that live in society. Hermeneutics, in this case, serves as a methodological tool to harmonise between aesthetic expression and theological authority.<sup>9</sup>

In examining the theological limits to the reinterpretation of Islamic aesthetics in contemporary da'wah art, this research adapts the hermeneutic approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur as the main conceptual framework. This approach was chosen to examine the dynamics of meaning that emerge from the interaction between visual texts, Islamic aesthetic values, and the surrounding socio-cultural context. Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasises the importance of the *fusion of horizons*, where understanding is formed through a dialogue between the past horizon of meaning (Islamic theological tradition) and the present horizon (modern social conditions). This approach allows for

<sup>5</sup> H Setiawan, R Fauziah, and A Wijaya, 'The Role of Symbolism in Classical Islamic Aesthetics and Its Application in Visual Da'wah', *Journal of Islamic Studies and Visual Arts* 10, no. 1 (2024): 25–44, <https://doi.org/10.21093/jkiv.v10i1.2024>.

<sup>6</sup> M Zabidi, 'Hermeneutics in Visual Da'wah: Symbol Interpretation in the Digital Age', *Journal of Visual Islamic Communication* 6, no. 1 (2020): 15–34, <https://doi.org/10.21093/jkiv.v6i1.2020>.

<sup>7</sup> Saeful Anwar and Ahmad Firdaus, 'The Application of Mujadalah Da'wah Method in Taklim Assembly', *Lanter: Journal of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting* 2, no. 1 (2023): 23–31, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30999/lantera.v2i1.2692>.

<sup>8</sup> Zabidi, 'Hermeneutics in Visual Da'wah: Symbol Interpretation in the Digital Age'.

<sup>9</sup> Meifitriadi, Hasanah, and Nurhadi, 'Convergence of Spiritual Values and Visual Forms in Islamic Da'wah'.

the analysis of how visual symbols in da'wah art are reinterpreted by contemporary audiences living in a cultural reality that is different from their original context.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, Ricoeur offers the idea of the *interpretative arc*, which explains that the understanding of symbols or visual texts is the result of a three-stage process: pre-understanding, distanciation, and appropriation. Through this model, the researcher is able to distinguish between the meaning intended by the da'wah artist and the meaning captured by the public, and identify the intersection or potential dissonance between the two.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the hermeneutic approach in this study is not just an aesthetic interpretation tool, but also a critical means to connect between Islamic normative heritage and visual transformation in a digital and global context. This supports the argument that contemporary da'wah art can be a new articulation space that remains faithful to Islamic values while being responsive to the dynamics of the times.

The role of visual media in religious education is also increasingly recognised. Several studies have shown that da'wah material packaged aesthetically through graphic design, animated videos, or multimedia installations can increase interest in learning and understanding of Islamic teachings, especially among the younger generation.<sup>12</sup> In this context, aesthetics does not only function as a complement, but as an effective pedagogical strategy. Symbolism in Islamic aesthetics, such as the use of geometric shapes, floral motifs and calligraphy, shows that beauty in Islam is functional rather than merely decorative. These elements are a means to communicate theological values in a subtle yet profound manner.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, any attempt to reinterpret Islamic aesthetics in da'wah art must retain its symbolic integrity so as not to lose the meaning contained therein.<sup>14</sup>

This research suggests that the reinterpretation of Islamic aesthetics cannot be done carelessly. It requires a deep understanding of the basic principles of Islam as well as the socio-cultural context in which the da'wah message is delivered.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the resulting da'wah artworks are not only successful in attracting the attention of the audience but also strengthen a solid and contextualised Islamic identity. In this context, the integration of

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, n.d.), 18.

<sup>11</sup> P Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 31.

<sup>12</sup> S Khadijah, 'The Effectiveness of Visual Media in Improving Adolescent Religious Literacy', *Journal of Digital Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (2018): 13–28, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jpid.v5i1.2018>.

<sup>13</sup> Setiawan, Fauziah, and Wijaya, 'The Role of Symbolism in Classical Islamic Aesthetics and Its Application in Visual Da'wah'.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Faruqi, *Seni Tauhid: Esensi Dan Ekspresi Estetika Islam*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Zabidi, 'Hermeneutics in Visual Da'wah: Symbol Interpretation in the Digital Age'.

philosophical and aesthetic dimensions in da'wah art opens space for dialogue between beauty and truth. The philosophical perspective places art as a way to approach the deeper meaning of life, which is not only related to form but also moral and spiritual substance. Therefore, da'wah art cannot be separated from ethical responsibility towards society and the social environment.

This study emphasises that the reinterpretation of Islamic aesthetics is an ongoing process that involves theological reflection, artistic innovation and cultural sensitivity. The paradigm shift in the delivery of da'wah messages demands a more adaptive and collaborative approach, without losing the authenticity of the religious values that are the main foundation. Thus, this research contributes to formulating a conceptual framework that can serve as a reference for the development of da'wah art in Indonesia and the Islamic world in general.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a hermeneutic analysis method to reinterpret Islamic aesthetic values in the context of contemporary da'wah art. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring the symbolic meanings contained in visual artworks used as a medium of da'wah. The main focus of the study lies on the relationship between aesthetic expression and theological normative boundaries in the practice of visual da'wah in the digital era.

The data sources in this research consist of two categories, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through observation of contemporary da'wah artworks spread across various digital platforms, such as social media, visual da'wah websites, and Islamic-based art installations. The sample selection was purposive, taking into account visual representations that combine traditional elements and modern innovations. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from a literature review of academic journals, books and articles that discuss Islamic aesthetics, da'wah art, as well as hermeneutic and visual communication theories.

The data analysis process was conducted through interpretative techniques by focusing on the relationship between visual symbols and the theological meanings contained therein.<sup>16</sup> The researcher adapted the hermeneutic models of Gadamer and

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<sup>16</sup> Anton Bakker and Achmad Charris Zubair, *Philosophy Research Methodology*, 16th ed. (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1990), 60.

Ricoeur to understand the dynamics of meaning that arise due to the interaction between visual texts and socio-cultural contexts. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation and cross-referencing between observational data and relevant scientific literature. Thus, this method is expected to produce a deep and comprehensive understanding of how the reinterpretation of Islamic aesthetics can be harmonized with the principles of da'wah and the needs of contemporary times.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Dialectics of Tradition and Innovation in the Aesthetic Symbol of Da'wah

The results of this study indicate a paradigmatic shift in the use of visual symbols in contemporary da'wah art. These changes do not only concern forms and techniques, but also touch the ideological and epistemological realms of religious visual expressions. The art of da'wah is no longer fixated on traditional representations alone, but has undergone a transformation through innovative adaptations that integrate digital technology and the current social context. Symbols such as Islamic geometry, calligraphy and *arabesque* motifs that previously represented cosmic order and classical spirituality are now given a new dimension that is more communicative and responsive to the dynamics of society.<sup>17</sup>

In the Islamic tradition, geometric symbols and *arabesques* are deeply connected to the concepts of tawhid, divine order and the sanctity of spiritual space. Calligraphy is even considered a textual manifestation that expresses the glory of God's word aesthetically. However, the results of this study show that the transformation of these symbols has enabled a new dimension in the practice of visual da'wah. Symbols that were once static and sacred are now reinterpreted to convey moral messages that are more contextual and dialogical. This adaptation is done without abandoning the core values contained in them, making traditional symbols a bridge between the authenticity of Islam and the needs of contemporary visual expression.<sup>18</sup>

Geometric symbols in Islamic art, which originally stemmed from the principle of order in mosque architecture and decoration, are now used in various digital mediums such as infographics, visual typography and interactive graphic design.

<sup>17</sup> A Khairullah and R Rachmi, 'Symbolic Contestation in Da'wah Art: A Case Study of Islamic Visual Aesthetics in Online Media', *Journal of Islamic Aesthetics and Communication* 8, no. 1 (2024): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.21093/jeki.v8i1.2024>.

<sup>18</sup> Khairullah and Rachmi.

These patterns not only retain a harmonious aesthetic appeal, but also provide a systematic visual framework to explicitly convey moral and theological messages. The use of these elements in a digital format emphasises the symbol's versatility in meeting the challenges of modern communication. This integration reflects the dialectic between historical symbolic roots and innovative visual strategies.<sup>19</sup>

Calligraphy, which has historically held a high position in Islamic art due to its ability to visually convey divine messages, has undergone significant reinterpretation in the digital context. The transformation of calligraphy from a traditional form to a digital medium is a form of innovation that utilises technology to maintain its aesthetic aspects while increasing the affordability of the da'wah message. Digital calligraphy not only maintains its rhythm and visual beauty, but also allows the audience to interact more personally with the message conveyed. The results of this study show that the use of digital calligraphy is a strategic response to media realities that demand a more flexible and communicative delivery format without sacrificing religious values.<sup>20</sup>

The *arabesque* motif, traditionally laden with transcendent ornamentation and symbolism, has also undergone a process of transformation through contemporary digital and graphic mediums. This adaptation of the motif not only renews its visual appearance, but also brings moral messages that are more relevant to the current social context. Through animation techniques and visual design engineering, *arabesque* is reconstructed in a more communicative and transformative form. This visualisation marks a shift from a rigid aesthetic form to a flexible medium of expression open to new interpretations. This transformation illustrates that spiritual values in Islamic art can still be maintained even through a more dynamic and contemporary medium.<sup>21</sup>

This symbolic shift is reinforced by visual innovations in the form of infographics, digital animation, and public mural art. Infographics enable the delivery of da'wah messages in a systematic and efficient manner, while being visually appealing. The research data shows that the presentation of Islamic messages through infographics expands the reach of da'wah, especially to the digital generation who prefer concise and interactive forms of delivery. Thus, infographics function not just

<sup>19</sup> L Bissalam, 'Adaptation of Traditional Symbols in Digital Da'wah Graphic Design', *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Arts* 6, no. 1 (2024): 78–94, <https://doi.org/10.31095/jcia.v6i1.2024>.

<sup>20</sup> Iswahyudi, 'Aesthetics in Islamic Art According to Sayyed Hossein Nasr', *Jurnal Budaya Nusantara* 3, no. 1 (2019): 32–45.

<sup>21</sup> F Ritawati, 'Reconstruction of Arabesque Motifs in Islamic Graphic Design', *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Design* 5, no. 2 (2023): 101–18, <https://doi.org/10.21093/jdik.v5i2.2023>.

as visual aids, but as a key communication medium in bridging theological content and public information needs.

Public mural art, which developed as an urban art form, has also been adopted as an effective visual da'wah medium. The advantage of murals lies in its ability to reach public spaces directly and create spontaneous interaction with the community. The combination of traditional symbols such as calligraphy and geometric patterns with modern visual techniques produces works that are not only aesthetic, but also educative. The creative process in making murals involves the reinterpretation of Islamic values in the social context of urban society, which makes this art a strategic and inclusive instrument of da'wah.<sup>22</sup>

The transformation of these visual da'wah mediums can be explained through a hermeneutic approach, particularly the concept of *fusion of horizons* proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. This concept explains that understanding of meaning occurs when the historical horizons of traditional symbols meet and dialogue with new horizons formed by today's social, cultural and technological realities.<sup>23</sup> Symbols in da'wah art are no longer static entities, but rather the meeting point between old values and new communication needs. With this framework, any adaptation of traditional symbols is an effort to enrich, not replace, existing meanings.

Gadamer's hermeneutic model confirms that da'wah aesthetics are not merely decorative, but contain interpretive dimensions that are dialogical in nature. Therefore, contemporary da'wah artists act as intermediaries who expand the horizons of public understanding through visual symbols. They do not simply passively reproduce traditional forms, but create new meanings that remain rooted in Islamic principles. This process shows that contemporary da'wah art is in a productive tension between maintaining authentic values and responding to the challenges of the times.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the adaptation of da'wah aesthetic symbols in a modern context shows that innovation is not always against tradition. Instead, in many cases, innovation becomes a means to expand the reach of religious symbols and strengthen the resonance of spiritual values in an increasingly heterogeneous and digitalised society.

<sup>22</sup> A Zanzibar, 'Urban Da'wah and Mural Art: Islamic Narratives in Public Spaces', *Journal of Islamic Urbanisation and Aesthetics* 3, no. 1 (2024): 72–90, <https://doi.org/10.21093/juie.v3i1.2024>.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Valerie Fleming and Yvonne Robb, 'A Critical Analysis of Articles Using a Gadamerian Based Research Method', *Nursing Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12283>.



Reinterpretation of visual symbols becomes a creative practice that maintains historical continuity while accommodating social and technological changes. This confirms that the art of da'wah is a space for productive encounters between faith, visual culture, and social transformation.

## 2. Reconstructing Aesthetic Meaning through Hermeneutic Interpretative Processes

The hermeneutic approach, especially through the *interpretative arc* model developed by Paul Ricoeur, offers a strong theoretical framework in understanding the reconstruction of aesthetic meaning in contemporary da'wah art. Through this approach, da'wah artworks are no longer seen as static visual objects, but rather as layered visual texts that continue to undergo meaning formation through the process of interpretation. In Ricoeur's model, the interpretation process is divided into three main stages, namely *pre-understanding (prefiguration)*, *distanciation (configuration)*, and *appropriation (refiguration)*. These three stages function as a dialectical structure that connects the theological tradition with the social context and experience of the audience in forming new meanings.<sup>25</sup>

The pre-understanding stage is rooted in theological values and traditional references that form the symbolic foundation of da'wah artworks. In this phase, creators internalise Islamic visual symbols such as calligraphy, geometric motifs and *arabesque* ornaments, which have long been representations of the order of the cosmos and spiritual transcendence. These symbols not only convey aesthetic beauty, but also carry a deep theological content. Grounded in this pre-understanding framework, the creators of the works maintain the continuity of values of the Islamic heritage while opening up interpretive spaces that allow for the connection between old values and contemporary needs of expression.<sup>26</sup>

The next process, distanciation, reflects the creative endeavour to distance the work from its original symbolic form in order to reconfigure it in a more contextually relevant visual form. At this stage, artists do not erase traditional values, but rather reconstruct them through contemporary visual techniques such as digital animation,

<sup>25</sup> Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> T Martono, *Interpretative Aesthetics: Paul Ricoeur and Symbols in Art* (Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu, 2019).

infographics, installation art and public murals. This visual transformation generates an interpretative distance between the work and its original values, allowing the audience to see Islamic symbols in a fresh perspective. In this process, distancing becomes the starting point for the formation of a new horizon of understanding, where classical values are reread through the lens of modern visual culture.

The transformation also included innovative visual techniques, such as the use of dynamic colours, experimental typography, and the processing of calligraphic forms into more expressive ones. These techniques not only shift symbolic representations from formal rigidity towards expressive flexibility, but also give them new meanings previously unattainable by traditional forms. Distancing, in this context, functions as a transitional space that allows for the re-creation of a more communicative and adaptive da'wah aesthetic identity to media developments and the expectations of today's audiences.

The final stage, appropriation, emphasises the audience's active role in reconstructing meaning. At this point, the da'wah artwork becomes an open text that is subjectively interpreted by each individual based on their social, cultural, spiritual background and life experiences.<sup>27</sup> The audience's interpretation is not passive, but an active contribution that shapes the final meaning of the work. For example, experimental-style calligraphy may be interpreted as a form of progressive innovation by young people, but viewed as a deviation from the norm by conservative groups. This phenomenon shows that aesthetic meaning in da'wah is fluid, open and negotiative.

The field findings support the differentiation of meaning between the creator's intention and the audience's interpretation. This difference is not a failure of communication, but rather a manifestation of the dynamics of meaning exchange that enriches the discourse of visual da'wah.<sup>28</sup> In Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective, every interpretation is the result of a meeting between the creator's horizon of understanding and the new horizon owned by the audience. It is this inter-horizon dialogue process that allows the formation of pluralistic and inclusive meanings.

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<sup>27</sup> Martono.

<sup>28</sup> D Wiratno, 'Appropriation and Conflict of Interpretation in Digital Islamic Art', *Journal of Visual Islamic Discourse* 7, no. 2 (2023): 55–73, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jwiv.v7i2.2023>.

Distanciation not only creates visual distance, but also creates conceptual space that encourages audiences to review Islamic symbols from a more reflective and contextualised perspective.<sup>29</sup> Da'wah art that succeeds in creating distanciation is effectively able to invite active participation from the public in rereading the meaning of Islamic symbols in a way that is more relevant to the contemporary social context. In this context, distanciation functions as a link between authenticity and innovation, as well as between normative values and creative expression.

Appropriation as the final phase of the interpretative process becomes the key point in the formation of a complete aesthetic meaning. At this stage, visual symbols no longer have a single meaning determined by the creator, but rather undergo a transformation based on the interpretative lens of each audience. This dynamic creates a discursive space that allows a plurality of interpretations to develop naturally. As a result, da'wah artworks do not merely become monolithic representations of Islamic values, but function as dialogical mediums that open up space for the participation of meanings from various social perspectives.

In practice, the differences in interpretation between conservative and progressive groups reflect the contestation between different horizons of understanding. Conservative groups tend to rely on pre-understanding based on traditional authority, while progressive groups are more open to creative appropriation through re-reading symbols in a contemporary context.<sup>30</sup> These differences show that da'wah art does not operate in a closed space of meaning, but in an open and dynamic interpretive ecosystem. This analysis reinforces the view that contemporary da'wah art functions as a dialogical visual communication medium. The involvement of the audience in the appropriation process makes them not just passive recipients, but co-creators in the formation of meaning. With this approach, the process of da'wah communication is no longer one-way, but a rich, reflective and transformative social interaction. In this context, aesthetic meaning in da'wah art is understood as an entity that is constantly evolving along with social and technological dynamics.

In addition, the hermeneutic interpretive approach also shows that every symbol in da'wah art can undergo re-signification depending on the medium and context of its

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<sup>29</sup> D Cob, 'Visual Distancing and Reinterpretation: Ricoeur's Arc in Islamic Art', *Hermeneutic Journal of Media and Religion* 11, no. 1 (2024): 20–37, <https://doi.org/10.31940/hjmr.v11i1.2024>.

<sup>30</sup> Wiratno, 'Appropriation and Conflict of Interpretation in Digital Islamic Art'.

use. The same symbol can mean something different when transferred from the mosque wall to a digital format such as a short video or social media poster design. This medium transformation is part of the distancing that allows for a re-reading of the values contained in the symbol.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, digital media not only expands the reach of da'wah, but also expands the horizon of meanings that can be created and communicated.

Ricoeur's interpretive framework asserts that aesthetic meaning is the result of an interpretive journey that is never finalised. This process continues as long as there is interaction between the work and the audience in various contexts of time and place. Thus, da'wah art becomes an open entity that is constantly updated and adapted to the challenges of the times. The sustainability of this collectively formed meaning makes da'wah art relevant as a medium for renewing Islamic values in an ever-evolving society.

Based on the results of this analysis, it shows that the reconstruction of aesthetic meaning in da'wah art cannot be separated from interpretative dynamics that involve creators and audiences in equal relations. The *interpretative arc* model provides a strong theoretical foundation to understand how Islamic visual symbols transform through the processes of pre-understanding, distancing, and appropriation. The process shows that da'wah aesthetics are not closed or dogmatic, but adaptive and open to change. Thus, contemporary da'wah art has great potential to become an inter-generational and intercultural dialogue space in conveying Islamic values aesthetically and communicatively.

### **3. The Integration of Theological Values in Visual Innovation: Between Legitimacy and Relevance**

The results of this study show that contemporary da'wah artists have a high awareness of the importance of maintaining theological legitimacy in every form of visual innovation they produce. Amidst the development of digital technology and changing patterns of visual communication, they do not necessarily abandon the basic principles of Islam that have been the foundation of da'wah for centuries. Despite the exploration of new forms such as interactive animation, digital design, and social

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<sup>31</sup> Cob, 'Visual Distancing and Reinterpretation: Ricoeur's Arc in Islamic Art'.

media, the creation process is still conducted within the corridors of established sharia values.

Visual innovation in da'wah art is not merely a product of modern aesthetics, but the result of creative appropriation of Islamic heritage. This is in line with the hermeneutic framework that emphasises the importance of the relationship between tradition and contemporary context in the formation of meaning. Artists do not simply replicate traditional visual forms, but actively re-read them and reconstruct them in formats that are acceptable to contemporary audiences. This transformation creates works that are dialogical in nature: maintaining the symbolic authenticity of Islam, while addressing the needs of religious communication in an ever-evolving digital space.<sup>32</sup>

Today's visual da'wah works show a synergy between traditional elements-such as calligraphy, geometric motifs, and Islamic ornamentation-with adaptive contemporary visual approaches. Calligraphy, for example, no longer comes in a static form that adorns the walls of mosques, but is repackaged in the format of moving animations, infographic designs, and interactive visual narratives on social media. However, although the medium changes, the substance of the message still refers to moral and theological principles that can be accounted for.<sup>33</sup>

This strategy demands a high degree of theological sensitivity, as every visual modification can have meaning consequences. Therefore, da'wah artists collaborate closely with scholars and academics in their creative process. This collaboration is not just a formality, but a space for critical discussion to evaluate the validity of every symbol, narrative and technique used in visual da'wah works.<sup>34</sup> This cross-disciplinary approach becomes an epistemic monitoring mechanism so that the work is aesthetically appealing and theologically valid.

The use of digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok provides a new space for visual da'wah expression. However, this ease of distribution also brings challenges, namely the potential for message distortion due to fragmented meanings. Therefore, the integration of theological values in digital media is not just an

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<sup>32</sup> N Anggia, *Visual Media and the Da'wah of Generation Z: Aesthetics, Messages, and Digital Platforms* (Jakarta: Pustaka Dakwah Digital, 2024).

<sup>33</sup> Bissalam, 'Adaptation of Traditional Symbols in Digital Da'wah Graphic Design'.

<sup>34</sup> Khairullah and Rachmi, 'Symbolic Contestation in Da'wah Art: A Case Study of Islamic Visual Aesthetics in Online Media'.

adaptation of form, but a process of curating meaning so that each visual message remains consistent with Islamic teachings. This strategy results in works that not only convey information, but also shape spiritual awareness through strong and valuable visual representations.

The hermeneutic approach, particularly in Paul Ricoeur's thought, explains that the process of interpretation always involves three stages: pre-understanding, distanciation, and appropriation. In the context of da'wah art, pre-understanding refers to the theological framework that has taken root in the artist and the community.<sup>35</sup> Distanciation occurs when old symbols are repackaged with new techniques and mediums, creating an aesthetic distance that triggers re-reading. Appropriation occurs when audiences - both Muslim and non-Muslim - interpret the meanings contained in the work according to their own backgrounds and social contexts.<sup>36</sup>

This indicates that visual da'wah art is not monolithic in meaning. Each work is open to multiple interpretations, which actually enriches the da'wah dimension itself. Therefore, the integration of theological values not only maintains the limits of legitimacy, but also opens up space for reflection and constructive social dialogue. In many cases, successful works are not the most visually grand, but those that are able to convey deep spiritual meaning in a relevant and digestible way.

The strategic role of visual da'wah practitioners in designing content that is at once compelling and valuable is evidence that art does not stand outside of spiritual space, but is part of the praxis of religion itself. Artists involved in this creative process not only function as designers, but also as interpreters of value. They become an extension of the moral authority that represents Islamic values through a visual medium that is more easily accepted by modern society.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, this integration also serves as a link between generations. Islamic symbols that may be considered rigid or irrelevant by the younger generation are re-presented in an attractive form without losing substance. In this way, the da'wah process not only maintains the visual heritage of Islam, but also updates it to keep it alive and meaningful in the contemporary context.<sup>38</sup> The integration of theological

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<sup>35</sup> Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 79.

<sup>36</sup> Martono, *Interpretative Aesthetics: Paul Ricoeur and Symbols in Art*.

<sup>37</sup> Bissalam, 'Adaptation of Traditional Symbols in Digital Da'wah Graphic Design'.

<sup>38</sup> Khairullah and Rachmi, 'Symbolic Contestation in Da'wah Art: A Case Study of Islamic Visual Aesthetics in Online Media'.

values in visual innovation shows that today's da'wah does not have to choose between authenticity and aesthetic appeal. Both can go together through a scientifically and spiritually responsible creative process. Successful da'wah artworks are the result of a synthesis between commitment to religious values and adaptability to changes in modern media and visual culture. This process confirms the role of art as the dynamic, inclusive and reflective heart of religious communication.

#### D. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that contemporary da'wah art has undergone significant development through the integration of Islamic aesthetic symbols and digital visual innovation. Reinterpretations of calligraphy, geometric motifs and *arabesques* have created new expressions that are more communicative without letting go of their theological roots. The hermeneutic models of Gadamer and Ricoeur prove relevant in explaining the dynamics of meaning that occur between the creator of the work, the visual symbols, and the audience. This approach shows that meaning in da'wah art is dialogical, open to reinterpretation, and influenced by social context and media development.

However, this research has limitations in the scope of data that predominantly comes from digital observation and visual artefacts in online media, without involving in-depth interviews with artists or audiences. In addition, the local context of Islamic culture outside Indonesia has not been used for comparison, so the generalisability of the findings is limited. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand geographical coverage, involve visual ethnography methods, and explore audience responses to visual dakwah forms more empirically. With a more comprehensive approach, da'wah art studies can strengthen its role as an adaptive, reflective and theological transformative medium.

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