



NEGOTIATING ESCHATOLOGY ONLINE: NETIZENS' RECEPTION OF USTADZ ZULKIFLI MUHAMMAD ALI'S YOUTUBE DA'WAH

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Abstract

This study examines how YouTube audiences interpret eschatological Islamic da'wah messages delivered by Ustadz Zulkifli Muhammad Ali within the digital public sphere. Employing a qualitative reception analysis, the research draws on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework to categorize audience interpretations into preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings. The data were collected from user comments posted on the YouTube video "The End of the Age is Very Near" and systematically analyzed using NVivo 12 Plus. The findings reveal that negotiated and oppositional readings are more prominent than preferred readings, indicating a critical and reflexive mode of audience engagement. Many responses articulate skepticism, satire, and selective acceptance of the eschatological message, as viewers attempt to contextualize the da'wah within broader social realities, religious knowledge, and contemporary concerns. These patterns suggest that digital da'wah audiences do not merely consume religious messages but actively interpret, contest, and reframe them. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on digital da'wah and religion online by demonstrating that religious meaning on social media is produced through dialogic and contested processes, where religious authority and interpretation are continuously negotiated in platform-mediated environments.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana audiens YouTube menafsirkan pesan dakwah Islam eskatologis yang disampaikan oleh Ustadz Zulkifli Muhammad Ali dalam ruang publik digital. Dengan menggunakan analisis resepsi kualitatif, penelitian ini menerapkan kerangka encoding/decoding Stuart Hall untuk mengklasifikasikan interpretasi audiens ke dalam kategori pembacaan dominan (preferred), negosiasi (negotiated), dan oposisi (oppositional). Data diperoleh dari komentar pengguna pada video YouTube berjudul "Akhir Zaman Sudah Sangat Dekat" dan dianalisis secara sistematis menggunakan perangkat lunak NVivo 12 Plus. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembacaan negosiasi dan oposisi lebih dominan dibandingkan pembacaan dominan, yang mengindikasikan keterlibatan audiens yang kritis dan reflektif. Banyak respons audiens mengekspresikan sikap skeptis, satir, serta penerimaan selektif terhadap pesan eskatologis, seiring dengan upaya mereka mengontekstualisasikan dakwah dalam realitas sosial, pengetahuan keagamaan, dan persoalan kontemporer. Pola ini menunjukkan bahwa audiens dakwah digital tidak berperan sebagai penerima pasif, melainkan sebagai penafsir aktif yang terlibat dalam proses negosiasi makna. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian dakwah digital dengan menegaskan bahwa makna keagamaan di media sosial terbentuk melalui proses dialogis dan kontestatif, di mana otoritas dan penafsiran keagamaan dinegosiasi secara terbuka dalam lingkungan media yang dimediasi platform.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes how people access information, including religious matters. One of the manifestations of this transformation can be seen in the practice of Islamic da'wah, which is now increasingly carried out through social media platforms such as YouTube. This digital da'wah not only



delivers conventional religious messages but also addresses contemporary themes, such as eschatological issues and the end times. One of the public figures who has been active in conveying eschatological da'wah on YouTube is Ustad Zulkifli Muhammad Ali. His lectures on the narrative "The End of Time Is Very Near" attracted mixed responses from online audiences, especially in the YouTube comments. This phenomenon raises an important question: how exactly are the messages of da'wah received, understood, and interpreted by audiences with different social and cultural backgrounds?

This issue is important to research because the audience's acceptance of da'wah messages in the digital era is no longer passive. As people's participation in producing and commenting on social media content increases, audiences now play an active role in shaping the meaning of the messages they consume. In this context, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory becomes highly relevant (Ross, 2011). Hall emphasizes that communication is not linear but a complex process in which the audience actively constructs meaning. The audience can take a dominant position (accepting the message according to the sender's intent), a negotiation position (accepting part and rejecting part), or an opposition position (completely rejecting the message being conveyed) (Kumala & Sukmono, 2023; Setiawan & Nufiarni, 2023).

The main purpose of this study is to analyze how the YouTube audience interprets the eschatological da'wah messages delivered by Ustad Zulkifli Muhammad Ali. This study employs a qualitative reception analysis of YouTube comments to examine audience interpretations and patterns of meaning-making in the comment section. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theoretical framework, this study explores how different reception positions emerge and how socio-cultural considerations inform the decoding of eschatological discourse in a digital public space (Caliandro, 2017; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018).

The relationship of this research with the previous literature is quite close. Previous studies have shown that audiences on social media, such as YouTube, actively decode messages based on their cultural backgrounds (Dini et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). Even in the context of digital da'wah, the audience does not always receive the message unanimously, but instead creates new meanings through dialogue and criticism (Nurhablisyah & Bakti, 2024; Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022). In addition, the use of YouTube as a da'wah medium has proven to be effective in reaching the younger generation, which prefers visual and interactive communication styles (Ayubi et al., 2023; Sikumbang et al., 2023). However, there has not been much research that links explicitly Stuart Hall's theory to the reception of eschatological da'wah messages on YouTube, especially in the Indonesian context.

Despite the extensive use of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory in media and audience studies, research examining the reception of eschatological Islamic da'wah on YouTube within the Indonesian context remains limited. Existing studies on digital da'wah tend to focus on general religious messaging, while overlooking eschatological discourse, which intersects religious belief with ideological, political, and conspiratorial narratives and often provokes highly polarized audience responses. Addressing this gap, this study applies Hall's reception framework through a netnographic analysis of YouTube comments to examine how audiences interpret, negotiate, and contest eschatological da'wah messages in an algorithmically mediated public space. By doing so, the study contributes empirical and theoretical insight into how speculative and emotionally charged religious themes are negotiated in contemporary digital da'wah.

Based on this background, the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows: (1) How do YouTube users publicly articulate their interpretations of eschatological da'wah messages in the comment section of Ustad Zulkifli Muhammad Ali's video? (2)

How are preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings expressed and patterned within these comment interactions? (3) What socio – cultural references and discursive resources are mobilized by commenters in constructing their interpretations of eschatological da'wah?

By answering the formulation of these problems, this research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of digital da'wah studies and media communication. Theoretically, this study extends Stuart Hall's theory to the context of contemporary Islamic da'wah on social media. Meanwhile, in practice, the results of this research can serve as a reference for digital da'is in designing religious messages that are more inclusive, relevant, and communicative, tailored to the characteristics of their audience. As Hall (in Leao et al., 2020), understanding the audience as an active subject in the communication process is crucial for building a meaningful dialogical communication in this digital era.

This study employs a qualitative research design using a qualitative reception analysis of YouTube comments to examine how audiences interpret eschatological da'wah messages. The analysis focuses on naturally occurring user – generated content in a digital public space, treating the comment section as an interactional arena where religious meanings are articulated, negotiated, and contested. This approach draws on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, which has been widely applied in audience reception studies of digital media (Afandi & Rozi, 2024; Kumala & Sukmono, 2023).

The data corpus consists of publicly available comments posted on a selected YouTube video entitled "*The End of the Age Is Very Near*", delivered by Ustadz Zulkifli Muhammad Ali on his official YouTube account. At the time of data collection (07 – 31 – 2025), the video had approximately 351 total comments. From this corpus, 100 comments were selected for analysis using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were comments that explicitly contained interpretations, evaluations, agreements, critiques, satire, or skepticism related to the eschatological da'wah message. Comments consisting solely of emojis, spam, advertisements, repeated messages, or content unrelated to the video were excluded. Reply comments were included and treated as part of the same discursive space.

Data were collected through non – participant observation. Comments were manually retrieved using the YouTube interface with the sorting option set to top comments, acknowledging that platform sorting mechanisms may influence comment visibility. Although the comments analyzed are publicly accessible, ethical considerations were applied throughout the research process. Usernames and any potentially identifiable information were anonymized, and quotations were selected and presented in ways that minimize the risk of tracing them back to individual users. The researcher did not engage with commenters or intervene in discussions, and the analysis focuses on discursive patterns rather than individual identities, recognizing the sensitivity of religious discourse in digital environments.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 Plus software to organize, code, and analyze the comments thematically. The analytical process began with open coding to identify recurring keywords, phrases, and interpretive expressions, following qualitative reception analysis procedures applied in previous studies (Dini et al., 2023; Setiawan & Nufiarni, 2023). The coded data were then grouped into thematic categories corresponding to Stuart Hall's reception positions: preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings. This analytical framework has also been employed in studies of audience reception on digital platforms such as YouTube and TikTok (Afandi & Rozi, 2024; Fauzi et al., 2024).

Comments expressing multiple interpretive elements were coded according to their dominant orientation. Analytic memos were used to document coding decisions, particularly in ambiguous cases, and the coding framework was refined through iterative comparison between data segments and theoretical categories. In this study, the term "*reference*" refers to a coded segment of text identified during the NVivo analysis. A single comment may contain more than one reference if it includes multiple interpretive elements; therefore, reference frequency reflects the prominence of interpretive patterns rather than the number of unique users or comments.

To enhance analytical rigor, the coding process involved repeated review and refinement to ensure consistency between data and theoretical categories. While the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable, they provide in-depth qualitative insight into visible patterns of audience interpretation within this specific digital context.

AUDIENCE RECEPTION PATTERNS

This section presents the study's findings by examining how audiences interpret the eschatological da'wah message conveyed in the selected YouTube video. Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, audience interpretations expressed in the comment section were categorized into three reception positions: preferred reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading.

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model remains relevant in contemporary digital media environments, where meaning circulates through complex interactions between producers, platforms, and audiences. As Bodker (2018) argues, the digital landscape intensifies the visibility of decoding practices, making audience interpretations publicly observable and analytically traceable. In the context of YouTube, this visibility enables researchers to examine how preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings are articulated through audience comments within an ongoing public discourse.

The analysis shows that these reception positions are not evenly distributed. While some references align closely with the message and the authority of the preacher, negotiated and oppositional readings are more prominently articulated in the comment corpus, particularly regarding claims about the timing and certainty of the end times.

1. Preferred Reading

The majority of audience responses to Ustad Zulkifli Muhammad Ali's (UZMA) lecture "The End of Times Is Very Near" on YouTube fell into the categories of oppositional reading and negotiated reading, while only a small part was in preferred reading (dominant reading). The following shows the distribution of categories and subcategories based on the number of references identified in this research.

Table 1. Distribution of the Number of Netizen Comment References in Each Reception Category

Reception Position	Subcategories	Number of References	Analytical Interpretation
Preferred Reading	Ideological affirmations	9	Limited expressions of full acceptance and affirmation of the da'wah message
	Emotional	8	
Recontextualization		22	

Negotiated Reading	Selective about the content of the lecture	7	Selective acceptance combined with doctrinal or contextual reinterpretation
	Critical of rhetorical style	0	
Oppositional Reading	Satire	18	Skepticism, satire, and resistance toward eschatological claims
	Rational skepticism	7	
	Anti – Religious Authority	3	

This study analyzes YouTube comments using Stuart Hall's reception theory, which categorizes audience interpretations into three positions: preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings. The coding results indicate that oppositional readings appear most frequently as coded references, followed by negotiated readings, while preferred readings are least visible in the analyzed corpus.

It is important to note that these findings reflect the prominence of interpretive patterns rather than the number of individual commenters or viewers. The higher frequency of oppositional and negotiated references suggests that critical engagement, reinterpretation, and skepticism toward the eschatological narrative are more visibly articulated in the comment section. This pattern reinforces Hall's argument that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages but actively decode, negotiate, and contest meanings through their own interpretive frameworks. These patterns should therefore be understood as indicators of interpretive visibility within the analyzed comments, not as direct representations of the views held by the entire audience.

To provide a more precise analytical mapping of the identified reception patterns, Table 2 presents a typological summary of audience interpretations based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework. Rather than categorizing individual netizens, this table synthesizes the dominant characteristics and interpretive orientations reflected in the coded references across the comment corpus. The table serves as an analytical guide for understanding how different reception positions are articulated and prepares the ground for a more in-depth discussion in the following section.

Table 2. Typology of Audience Reception Patterns in Eschatological Da'wah

Reception Position	General Characteristics	Interpretive Orientation toward the Da'wah Message
Preferred Reading	Alignment with and reinforcement of the preacher's narrative	Affirmative acceptance and message reinforcement
Negotiated Reading	Acceptance of core religious message with contextual adjustment or critique	Selective acceptance combined with critical reflection
Oppositional Reading	Rejection of message claims, communicative style, or authority	Skeptical, critical, or resistant interpretation

The table above outlines an analytical typology of audience reception patterns toward Ustadz Zulkifli Muhammad Ali's eschatological lecture. To examine the interpretive dynamics underlying each category, the following sections elaborate on how preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings are articulated in the comment data, focusing on their dominant meaning tendencies and discursive functions rather than on individual audience groups.

In the preferred reading position, the da'wah message is decoded in close alignment with the meaning encoded by the preacher. References in this position fully accept the

claim that the end times are imminent, accompanied by strong emotional and religious affirmation. These responses reinforce the authority of the ustadz and to legitimize the eschatological narrative as religiously valid and urgent.

Preferred reading references frequently mobilize religious expressions such as prayers, salawat, declarations of faith, and Qur'anic or prophetic invocations. For example, one comment states: "It is very true what the ustadz conveyed... Let us remain patient and hold firmly to the Qur'an and Hadith...". Such references illustrate how acceptance of the message is intertwined with expressions of piety and collective religious identity. Rather than questioning the message, these interpretations reaffirm it through emotional resonance and doctrinal affirmation.

Although preferred readings appear less frequently in the coded data compared to negotiated and oppositional readings, their presence is analytically significant. They demonstrate how eschatological discourse can generate affective alignment and moral reassurance for some audiences. In several references, acceptance is accompanied by explicit support for the preacher, including praise, prayers for his well-being, and expressions of loyalty. These responses not only accept the message but also reproduce and amplify it by encouraging the sharing and dissemination of the lecture.

Analytically, preferred readings stabilize the eschatological narrative and reinforce religious authority in the digital space. By expressing unquestioned acceptance and emotional commitment, these interpretations contribute to the circulation of the da'wah message as a legitimate religious reminder. Rather than indicating the dominance of this position within the overall audience, the visibility of preferred reading references highlights one mode of meaning-making through which religious messages are affirmed and reinforced in YouTube comment interactions.

2. Negotiated Reading

The negotiated reading category is filled by many netizens who respond to the lecture in a middle way, neither completely rejecting nor unconditionally accepting. The group absorbed UZMA's spiritual message about the end times but interpreted it through their own personal perspectives, social logic, and religious understanding. Comments with negotiation nuances generally express approval of the core of the religious teachings conveyed, while expressing criticism or proposing adjustments to the lecture's details that are considered inappropriate.

Many netizens in this category acknowledge the fundamental truth that the apocalypse is certain and that people should strengthen their faith and spiritual preparation. They agree, for example, that the signs of the end times are indeed visible in modern life and that humans must remain vigilant and pious. Some commentaries call for the ummah to "hold fast to the Qur'an and Hadith" and to sincerely increase piety. This indicates that the moral message of the sermon on the importance of worship and spiritual preparation is well-received. However, alongside the approval, these audiences criticized parts of the lecture they found excessive or not in line with the teaching logic. One of the most obvious negotiations was about a specific doomsday time claim. Many commentaries affirm the doctrine that "the Apocalypse is God's business, and only God knows when it will happen."

The phrase "The Apocalypse only God knows" appears repeatedly in the discussion, confirming the audience's belief that humans are not authorized to determine the exact time. One reference states, "I believe the apocalypse will happen but not in 2026," indicating acceptance of eschatological belief while rejecting claims about its immediate or specific timing. Some even reminded of the track record of similar predictions before:

UZMA once stated that Imam Mahdi appeared in 2014, accompanied by a meteor shower, but "11 years have passed without appearing either", so the netizen reprimanded the ustād not to "arrogantly" determine the year because "the Prophet Muhammad did not determine the year". This example shows that the negotiation audience appreciates the spiritual message (faith and vigilance) but rejects bold claims about a timeline, which are considered speculative. In addition to the question of time, criticism is also directed at the rhetorical style which is regarded as too sensational. For example, several references express discomfort with the tendency to associate nearly every contemporary event with doomsday prophecy. Some comments explicitly criticize this interpretive habit as excessive or unreasonable. At the same time, these references indicate a selective acceptance of eschatological discourse: while acknowledging the legitimacy of discussing signs of the end times based on scriptural or doctrinal evidence, they reject interpretations that frame every current event as a definitive indicator of the apocalypse.

Other references question the practical value of lectures that place excessive emphasis on apocalyptic themes. "Just focus on worship, do good with many people, look at the many Indo people who are poor..." wrote a netizen, as if to say that instead of panicking with the prediction of the apocalypse, it is better to improve the condition of society now. This attitude rejects the implications of excessive fear; they negotiate eschatological messages to serve as an encouragement to do good in the real world today. In line with that, a cynical comment asked, "The end times are approaching... What's the problem?? You can't even wage jihad," which challenges sensational rhetoric without real action. Overall, the negotiated reading category shows that the audience actively filters UZMA's message: they affirm religious values considered true (faith in the last days, the importance of repentance and charity), but filter out elements of the lecture deemed incompatible with religious logic or empirical reality.

They, for example, remain faithful that the end times are real and take lessons to "wake up soon... Mumpung is still alive" so as not to neglect worship, but at the same time reject details such as determining the year of the apocalypse or the rhetoric of excessive fear. This reading of the negotiations shows the audience as a critical interpretive partner: they accept the ustād's core message about the importance of faith in a time of signification, but rephrase it to align it with common sense, social context, and the teaching that the occult is God's domain. Thus, netizens in this position prove that faith does not preclude criticism. Instead, they keep religious discourse rational and relevant, making the eschatological narrative as a spiritual reminder without causing blind panic.

3. Opposition Reading

Most responses from netizens fall under oppositional reading, a position in which the audience actively rejects UZMA's lectures. This category includes a wide range of expressions of rejection, ranging from theological arguments and rational skepticism to satire and sarcastic humor. The audience in this opposition group basically did not believe the ustād's claim that "the end of time is very near," and openly expressed their disbelief in the comment column. Many netizens immediately questioned the validity of UZMA's doomsday prediction, citing inconsistencies and inaccuracies.

They noted that the ustād's predictions were "always changing," so the rhetorical question "who believes" arises. Several comments also remind us that the question of when the apocalypse occurs is a mystery of God that humans cannot measure. A user wrote a sharp sarcasm: "The Apocalypse is because Allah knows that the Messenger of Allah does not know, [but] this is the person who claims to know the Apocalypse." This

statement confirms the mainstream ideological position that only Allah knows the end day, so everyone (even an ustad) who seems to "predict" the time of the apocalypse is considered presumptuous or far-fetched. Opposition netizens are also fond of dismantling UZMA's specific predictions that are not proven. There is a comment quoting the history of the ustad's previous prediction: "This doomsday committee once said dajal... 2014 and 2020 will be the apocalypse."

When the prophecy misses, the audience uses it as ammunition to refuse to believe the latest lecture. In essence, the record of past prediction failures is used to legitimize the message that the age of UZMA is ending in the present. In addition to rejecting the lecture's content, opposition commentators attacked the ustad's credibility and motives. Many question the authority of UZMA as the bearer of the news of the apocalypse, even labeling it as pejorative. For example, UZMA is labeled as a "fortune teller under the guise of ustad", or an "impromptu ustad" who "looks for money", to the point of being called "ustad bayar plin plan" by some users. These remarks show that the opposition audience refuses to recognize UZMA as a legitimate religious figure; Rather, it is seen as an opportunist who exploits the issue of the apocalypse for the sake of sensation or material gain. The credibility of UZMA is also compared to other figures, there are comments that exclaim "Remain the best Sheikh Imron Hosein", indicating that some of the audience believes more in other scholars and considers UZMA's lectures less valid. These attitudes are a form of decoding the opposition: netizens reject the dominant ideology that the ustad is trying to convey, and oppose the hegemonic position of UZMA as the sole source of truth.

In addition to serious arguments, many opposition responses manifest in humor and satire against UZMA's lecture style. Instead of being scared or swayed by the seemingly frightening "near end" narrative, the opposition audience turned it into a joke to weaken its effect. UZMA has even been dubbed the "doomsday committee" by some commentators, kind of "committee" whose job is to continuously predict the apocalypse. "Talk about something else," quipped a user who seemed bored with the recurring topic of the apocalypse. The ridicule shows that they treat this apocalypse talk not as a serious truth but as something monotonous and worthy of ignorance. Some openly call the UZMA lecture as mere entertainment: "It's been 15 years since this ustad predicted the apocalypse next year. Thank God for the entertainment we have in the 2 S2 that are laid off." This sarcastic comment conveyed that for a dozen years, the ustad predicted the apocalypse "next year" continuously, and it was actually used as entertainment by netizens, especially for those who are in difficulty (layoffs). Through the bitter joke, the audience actually said they did not consider the threat of the UZMA apocalypse credible at all; Ustad's narrative was instead used as a joke to reduce tension.

Another form of humor is evident in references that employ satire to question the preacher's credibility, such as dubbing UZMA as "Ustad Konoha," a label that mocks the tendency to claim interpretive authority over every global event. This comparison likens the preacher to a fictional character associated with exaggerated or fantastical explanations, thereby functioning as an oppositional reading. Another comment satirized the ustad's self-confidence: "It seems that you are sure that the apocalypse you will be saved... dream you drun", criticizing as if UZMA had thought that he must go to heaven when the apocalypse arrived. Through various expressions of sarcasm, opposition netizens dismantled the bombastic rhetoric of the lecture and neutralized the frightening effect they wanted to convey. Every eschatological claim raised by UZMA and this critical audience is turned into a subject of ridicule or rational debate, so that the dominant narrative of "the end times are near" loses its hegemonic power in the digital public space.

They collectively produce a counter-meaning: the apocalypse is God's business and cannot be sold as a mere sensational issue.

The above reading of the opposition confirms that the audience is active and agentic in the era of digital communication. Netizens are no longer passive communicators; they have a voice to challenge the speaker and redefine the message's meaning. In Hall's view, the YouTube comment space is transformed into an arena for negotiating of meaning, where the hegemonic narrative "from above" (ustad lectures) is not simply digested but responded to with references to collective knowledge and everyday logic.

The opposition audience in this case showed high media literacy; they could smell the possible motive behind the message of the imminent apocalypse, and then openly called the lecture "*ngawur*" or "apocalypse sales" to remind others not to be eaten raw. Through theological arguments (such as quoting the doctrine that only God knows the apocalypse), historical evidence (reminding of the failed prophecy of the ustad), to humor and satire, these commentators decode against the communicator's efforts to encode. As a result, the dominant narrative about the end times was successfully debated and creatively "reworked" by the public. The oppositional attitude of the audience shows that, in the era of social media, the meaning of a lecture is no longer monopolized by the speaker; the audience has a voice to dismantle, criticize, and even mock the dominant narrative, thereby fostering a more diverse counter-discourse in digital society.

To complete the mapping of reception categories based on Stuart Hall's theory, the following presents a representative example of netizens' comments that have been classified into each subcategory. This example is taken directly from the research data and reflects the diversity of meanings the audience attributed to the UZMA lecture. This table shows that each position is not only conceptually different but also tangible, as articulated by netizens in the YouTube comment column.

Table 3. Illustrative Coded References Representing Reception Patterns

Reception Position	Subcategories	Illustrative Reference Excerpt
Preferred Reading	Ideological affirmations	"Ustad's prediction is 75% accurate"
Preferred Reading	Emotional	"Allohumma sholi 'ala Sayyidina Muhammad... "Very well, Mr. O'Neill."
Negotiated Reading	Recontextualization	"Just focus on worship, do good with many people, look at the Indo people who are still poor..."
Negotiated Reading	Selective about the content of the lecture	"I'm sure the apocalypse will happen, but not in 2026."
Oppositional Reading	Rational skepticism	"The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not know what to do, but he did not know what to do."
Oppositional Reading	Satire	"It's been 15 years since this ustad predicted the apocalypse next year... Thank God for the entertainment we have in the layoffs."
Oppositional Reading	Anti-Religious Authority	"Fortune teller under the guise of ustad."

The illustrative references presented above demonstrate how different reception positions are articulated through language, affect, and reasoning in audience commentary. Rather than representing fixed audience groups, these examples show how preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings function as discursive patterns through which religious meaning is constructed and contested in the YouTube comment space.

Overall, the findings reveal a diverse spectrum of reception toward eschatological da'wah messages. Preferred readings are visible through references that affirm the imminence of the end times and reinforce the message through prayers, expressions of faith, and emotional alignment. Although these references appear less frequently in the coded data, they play an important role in stabilizing the eschatological narrative and reinforcing religious authority.

Negotiated readings emerge through references that accept the moral or spiritual core of the da'wah while questioning specific claims, particularly those related to the certainty or timing of the apocalypse. These interpretations illustrate how audiences recontextualize eschatological discourse to align it with doctrinal reasoning, everyday experience, and personal logic, rather than rejecting it outright.

Oppositional readings are prominently articulated through references expressing skepticism, satire, and resistance to religious authority. These interpretations challenge not only the message's content but also its rhetorical style and epistemic claims, transforming eschatological discourse into an object of critique and public debate. In this sense, opposition functions as active meaning-making rather than mere rejection.

Taken together, the coexistence of these reception positions highlights the dialogic nature of digital religious communication. Consistent with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, the findings show that eschatological da'wah messages are not received uniformly but are actively decoded, negotiated, and contested within an interactive digital environment. The YouTube comment section thus operates as a site of collective meaning-making, where religious messages are reshaped through ongoing interpretive interaction rather than determined solely by the authority of the preacher.

ANALYSIS OF NETIZENS' RECEPTION USING STUART HALL'S THEORY

This section presents the results of the analysis of YouTube audience reception toward Ustadz Zulkifli Muhammad Ali's eschatological-themed da'wah. The discussion is framed using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory to identify how netizens position themselves in interpreting the message. The analysis reveals three main positions (preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings), each reflecting different levels of acceptance, reinterpretation, or resistance to the da'wah narrative. To provide a comprehensive understanding, the sub-sections will elaborate on (1) the meaning of the message of eschatological da'wah by YouTube audiences, (2) the manifestation of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional positions in the comments, and (3) the socio-cultural factors that influence the decoding process.

1. The Meaning of the Message of Eschatological Da'wah

This section addresses the first research question by examining how YouTube audiences construct meaning in response to eschatological da'wah messages. Rather than assuming that meaning is fixed or directly transmitted from preacher to audience, the findings demonstrate that interpretation emerges through an active decoding process shaped by religious knowledge, emotional response, and digital communicative practices. This aligns with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, which emphasizes that

audiences within specific socio-cultural contexts reconstruct media meanings (Li et al., 2023).

Audience interpretations indicate that eschatological da'wah messages are not understood solely as theological warnings, but also as moral narratives and emotional prompts. Some references decode the message as a call for repentance and spiritual preparedness, emphasizing fear, humility, and obedience. These interpretations reflect a preferred reading position in which audiences align with the intended meaning encoded by the preacher. The familiarity of eschatological themes within Islamic belief systems allows such messages to resonate with existing religious frameworks, facilitating acceptance when the encoding aligns with audience values. Previous studies similarly note that messages embedded within shared belief systems are more readily decoded in line with the communicator's intent (Baskini et al., 2023).

At the same time, negotiated readings are prominently articulated in the coded references. In this position, the core religious message is accepted, while its implications are reinterpreted in relation to everyday religious life. Rather than focusing exclusively on apocalyptic urgency, these audiences emphasize ethical conduct, personal accountability, and gradual self-improvement. Such interpretations reveal an effort to reconcile eschatological discourse with practical religious reasoning, indicating that audiences actively recontextualize speculative religious narratives to fit lived experience. This pattern reflects critical engagement, particularly among digitally literate audiences, who tend to combine acceptance with reflection rather than uncritically adopt messages (Afandi & Rozi, 2024).

Oppositional readings further illustrate how meaning construction involves conscious resistance to certain interpretive frames. Comments categorized under this position express skepticism toward fear-based messaging, question the preacher's credibility or communicative style, or reject repeated end-times narratives altogether. These responses do not necessarily signify rejection of religion itself, but rather opposition to specific claims or modes of religious authority. As Hall argues, oppositional decoding emerges when audiences understand the intended meaning but deliberately reinterpret it through alternative ideological or experiential frameworks. Similar dynamics have been observed in studies of controversial and speculative content on YouTube, where audiences actively contest dominant narratives (Grusauskaite et al., 2022).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the meaning of eschatological da'wah is not singular or predetermined. Instead, it is constructed through a dynamic interpretive process in which audiences draw on doctrinal knowledge, emotional response, and practical reasoning. The diversity of preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings confirms the relevance of Hall's reception theory in the context of digital da'wah, where audiences function as active participants in meaning-making rather than passive recipients of religious messages (Li et al., 2023; Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022). These interpretive positions should therefore be understood as visible modes of meaning construction in audience discourse, rather than as fixed categories of audience types.

2. Dominant Positions, Negotiations, and Opposition

This section addresses the second research question by analyzing how different reception positions (preferred, negotiated, and oppositional) are articulated in audience commentary and how these positions function as interpretive strategies rather than fixed audience types. Drawing on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, the analysis shows that audience responses reflect ongoing negotiations of meaning, authority, and legitimacy within eschatological da'wah discourse.

Acceptance of both the message and the authority of the preacher characterizes preferred readings. These responses often manifest as expressions of emotional alignment, religious affirmation, and gratitude for being reminded of the signs of the end times. Such readings indicate a high level of resonance between the encoded message and the audience's existing religious framework. As noted in reception studies across different media contexts, alignment between message ideology and audience belief systems increases the likelihood of dominant decoding (Dini et al., 2023; Kumala & Sukmono, 2023; Li et al., 2023).

However, the relatively limited visibility of preferred reading references in the coded data suggests that unconditional acceptance is not the dominant mode of engagement in this digital space. This finding challenges assumptions about passive religious audiences and highlights the interpretive agency exercised by YouTube users.

Negotiated readings represent a more prevalent and analytically significant position. In this mode, audiences accept the core religious message, such as the importance of repentance and moral preparedness, while simultaneously questioning or reinterpreting specific claims, particularly those related to the prediction of the end times. This interpretive balancing act allows audiences to affirm religious commitment while asserting doctrinal boundaries and epistemic caution.

Consistent with Hall's concept of negotiated decoding, audiences adopt the dominant ideological framework but modify its application at a subordinate level (Li et al., 2023). Similar patterns have been observed in studies of digital audiences, where users selectively absorb media messages while filtering them through personal experience and rational consideration (Afandi & Rozi, 2024; Briandana et al., 2021). In the context of eschatological da'wah, negotiated readings indicate that audiences actively work to reconcile speculative religious narratives with everyday religious reasoning.

Oppositional readings further illustrate the active role of audiences' interpretations in resisting certain communicative styles and authority claims. These responses often take the form of skepticism, satire, or direct criticism, targeting fear-based narratives or questioning the credibility of repeated end-times claims. Importantly, such opposition does not necessarily reflect rejection of religion itself, but rather resistance to specific modes of religious communication perceived as excessive, misleading, or anxiety-inducing.

Hall conceptualizes oppositional decoding as occurring when audiences understand the intended meaning but reinterpret it through alternative ideological or experiential frameworks (Li et al., 2023). Studies of controversial content on YouTube similarly demonstrate that digital platforms facilitate counter-hegemonic readings by providing space for critique and comparison across sources (Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022). The presence of oppositional commentary in this study underscores that religious authority in digital da'wah environments is neither monolithic nor uncontested.

Taken together, the coexistence of preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings reveals a broader dynamic in which meaning, authority, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated within digital da'wah environments. Rather than functioning as a one-way transmission of religious messages, eschatological da'wah on YouTube operates within a dialogic space where acceptance, reflection, and resistance emerge simultaneously. This confirms the continued relevance of Hall's reception theory in analyzing religious communication in social media contexts, where audience participation makes interpretive differences publicly visible and analytically traceable (Li et al., 2023; Mathieu, 2015).

3. Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Decoding Process

This section addresses the third research question by examining how socio – cultural contexts shape the ways audiences decode eschatological da'wah messages. Rather than treating audience responses as reflections of fixed individual backgrounds, this analysis situates satire, skepticism, and resistance to authority within broader religious and social discourses that circulate in the Indonesian digital public sphere.

Comparable dynamics have been observed in other digital religious contexts, where social media platforms facilitate critical engagement and contested interpretations of religious authority. Fahad et al., (2023), for instance, show that online religious discussions often intersect with broader social and political sensibilities, encouraging audiences to actively negotiate, question, and reinterpret religious meanings rather than accepting them uncritically.

One prominent pattern shaping oppositional decoding is the use of satire and irony. In the Indonesian socio – cultural context, humor has long functioned as a culturally accepted mode of critique, enabling disagreement to be expressed without confrontation. In the comment section, satire operates as a discursive strategy through which audiences distance themselves from fear – based eschatological narratives while signaling critical awareness. This aligns with findings in previous studies showing that audiences often employ humor and irony to negotiate meaning and resist dominant interpretations in mediated texts (Kumala & Sukmono, 2023).

Negotiated and skeptical readings are also informed by dominant religious norms within Indonesian Islam, particularly the widely shared belief that knowledge of the exact timing of the end times belongs solely to God. Comments that emphasize phrases such as "only God knows" demonstrate how audiences draw on doctrinal principles to question specific claims while maintaining their religious commitment. Similar patterns of theologically grounded skepticism have been observed in studies of digital religious audiences, where religious literacy and exposure to multiple interpretive sources encourage negotiated decoding rather than full acceptance (Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022).

Another important socio – cultural frame shaping decoding is the changing configuration of religious authority in Indonesia's digital public sphere. The expansion of online religious content has diversified sources of Islamic knowledge and reduced the monopoly of individual preachers. Within this environment, authority is increasingly evaluated through public discussion, comparison, and critique. Comments questioning the preacher's credibility or consistency can therefore be understood as expressions of audiences negotiating religious authority, a dynamic also noted in previous research on preacher credibility and audience reception in online da'wah contexts (Nurhablisyah & Bakti, 2024).

The affordances of the YouTube platform further condition these decoding practices. Exposure to diverse religious content, algorithmic recommendation systems, and interactive features such as likes and replies shape how audiences encounter, compare, and evaluate eschatological narratives. Prior studies have noted that such media environments encourage both hybridization of religious messages and polarization of interpretations, depending on patterns of media consumption and digital literacy (Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022).

Taken together, these findings indicate that the decoding of eschatological da'wah messages emerges from the interaction between text, socio – cultural context, and platform dynamics. Consistent with Hall's argument that meaning is negotiated rather than transmitted intact, audiences draw on culturally available repertoires of critique, doctrinal reasoning, and evolving authority structures to interpret eschatological discourse

(Hall, 1980; Li et al., 2023). The YouTube comment section thus functions as a site of public meaning-making, where religious anxiety, authority, and interpretation are continuously negotiated. These socio-cultural factors should therefore be understood as discursive frames visible in audience commentary, rather than as definitive indicators of individual audience backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that eschatological da'wah on YouTube, particularly in Ustadz Zulkifli Muhammad Ali's lectures, is interpreted in diverse ways within audience commentary. Drawing on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, the analysis identifies three reception positions (preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings), indicating that religious messages in digital spaces do not circulate as fixed or uniformly received meanings. Meanwhile, some interpretive references align closely with the intended message and authority of the preacher, negotiated and oppositional readings are more prominently articulated in the coded data, reflecting critical engagement, doctrinal caution, and resistance to specific communicative styles or claims.

These findings highlight that digital da'wah operates within a dialogic and contested interpretive arena rather than as a one-way transmission of religious messages. Meaning emerges through active decoding processes in which religious knowledge, emotional response, and socio-cultural reasoning are mobilized to accept, reinterpret, or challenge eschatological narratives. In this sense, the YouTube comment section functions as a public space where religious authority and meaning are continuously negotiated.

Conceptually, this study contributes to the literature on digital Islamic communication by extending Stuart Hall's reception theory to the analysis of audience interpretations in platform-mediated environments. By foregrounding reception rather than sermon content alone, the study underscores the importance of examining how religious meaning is constructed through interaction, visibility, and contestation in digital publics.

Future research may expand this approach by examining multiple preachers or da'wah themes to capture broader interpretive patterns across different contexts. Combining comment analysis with interviews or longitudinal observation would also provide deeper insight into how reception positions evolve. Further studies should also consider the role of platform algorithms, media literacy, and religious literacy in shaping the visibility and reception of religious discourse in digital spaces.

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