

The Transformation of Preaching Through the Evolution of Islamic Comics: From Traditional Narratives to the Influence of the Korean Wave in Digital Media

Nikmah Lubis^{1*}, Lakum², Irwanto³

Institut Agama Islam Daar Al Uluum Asahan^{*1, 2, 3}

^{*1}email: nikmahlubis@iaidu-asahan.ac.id

²email: lakum@iaidu-asahan.ac.id

²email: irwanto@iaidu-asahan.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the adaptation of Islamic comics to technological advancements and contemporary cultural dynamics, with particular emphasis on their function as a medium of da'wah. The research applies a qualitative-descriptive approach with data collection conducted through netnography. The findings indicate a substantial transformation in both narrative structures and visual styles, accompanied by the growing use of digital platforms such as webtoons. Furthermore, Islamic comic creators have successfully incorporated elements of global popular culture, especially the Korean Wave, to attract younger audiences and expand the dissemination of religious messages. In conclusion, this study highlights that Islamic comics not only serve as creative instruments of da'wah but also operate as cultural bridges, enabling Islamic values to be conveyed in ways that are engaging, accessible, and contextually relevant to the younger generation.

Keywords: Islamic Comics; Preaching; Popular Media; Korean Wave; Webtoon.

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana komik Islam beradaptasi dengan kemajuan teknologi serta dinamika budaya kontemporer, dengan penekanan khusus pada fungsinya sebagai media dakwah. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui netnografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya transformasi substansial baik dalam struktur naratif maupun gaya visual, seiring dengan meningkatnya pemanfaatan platform digital seperti

webtoon. Selain itu, para kreator komik Islam berhasil mengintegrasikan unsur-unsur budaya populer global, khususnya Korean Wave, untuk menarik minat generasi muda serta memperluas jangkauan penyebaran pesan keagamaan. Sebagai kesimpulan, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa komik Islam tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai instrumen kreatif dakwah, tetapi juga sebagai jembatan budaya yang memungkinkan nilai-nilai Islam dikomunikasikan secara menarik, mudah diakses, dan relevan dengan konteks generasi muda.

Kata Kunci: Komik Islam; Dakwah; Media Populer; Korean Wave; Webtoon.

A. Introduction

The transformation of Islamic preaching through comics represents a distinctive intersection of religion, media, and popular culture. Historically, Islamic comics tended to rely on printed formats featuring narratives centered on the afterlife, moral admonitions, and traditional religious values. In contrast, the digital era has ushered in more creative and diverse formats—such as online comics and webtoons—that afford broader accessibility and richer storytelling for contemporary audiences. This evolution is critical to explore, as it reflects how Islamic preaching (da‘wah) has adapted to technological advancements and global cultural influences.

Recent literature has begun to explore the role of comics in digital da‘wah. (Hidayat dkk., 2024) analyzed how comics are employed as strategic media for preaching in the digital age, showing that web-based comics facilitate interactivity and audience engagement through features like comments, likes, and shares.

Meanwhile, (Andayani, 2022) examined the contribution of Islamic-themed comics to character education among adolescents. Collectively, these studies highlight the didactic and pedagogical potential of comics; however, they tend to neglect the cultural shifts that have significantly influenced their form and content.

Adapted from vintage comics that have left a lasting impression on the

collective memory of society, "Siksa Neraka" presents an intriguing reflection on the changes in how Islamic preaching is conveyed to the masses. In bygone eras, comics featuring threats of hellfire and promises of heavenly paradise might have been the preferred choice for comic artists to deliver religious messages. However, today, there is a proliferation of digital or web-based comics presenting Islamic preaching with a more creative approach. These comics demonstrate a significant transformation in how Islamic preaching is communicated to the public, particularly through visual media. Examples include Muslim Manga, Zzaman, Islamic Comics, and Salam Comics.

Furthermore, there are platforms or applications encompassing various genres like Webtoon. Originating from South Korea, Webtoon has gained significant popularity in Indonesia. While not specifically focused on Islamic comics, Webtoon offers a variety of comic genres, including those with Islamic themes or values often associated with the religion.

Webtoon provides genres such as romance, horror, comedy, thriller,

drama, and slice of life. These genres are not only dominated by Korean comics; many Indonesian comic artists also contribute their works. However, what is particularly interesting is that this medium is utilized by some young people for preaching. The use of Webtoon is part of popular media often utilized as an alternative medium for preaching. This method has been employed since the 1970s to the early 1990s by Tarbiyah activists, who used alternative media such as music, magazines, books, and comics to counter the adoption of Western culture by disseminating moral values in line with Islamic teachings.

Currently, the Eastern pop culture originating from South Korea has garnered significant attention. Various cultural products from this country have made waves worldwide through films, dramas, music, and comics, often referred to as the Korean Wave. Webtoon, as one aspect of the Korean Wave, has not escaped the attention of young people, especially Tarbiyah activists. They create new spaces by bringing together young Muslims who enjoy Korean comics but packaged in a

preaching format. They deliver preaching through comics with Korean visual influences. Moreover, many narratives used are related to the world of K-Pop. Simultaneously, they advocate the discourse of migration while still being able to follow current trends. This is vastly different from early Islamic comics, which focused more on narratives of the afterlife, heroism, and Javanese customs.

This illustrates how popular media not only facilitates new preaching models but has also transformed the form of comics from print to digital, and the narratives of preaching and Islamic meanings have also transformed to follow prevalent preaching trends circulating on social media.

In this study, the author will explore how changes in Islamic narratives are reflected in the evolution of Islamic comics from the past to the current context. Our main focus is on preaching through comics, with the aim of understanding the significant differences between Islamic comics of the past and present. The author will investigate how Islamic comics have transformed from approaches often

reliant on intimidation and threats to more varied and creative approaches in delivering religious messages.

B. Methods

This paper employs descriptive qualitative research, a method aimed at describing a phenomenon occurring in social life until reaching a conclusion. Data collection is conducted through netnographic work, which is a qualitative method used to understand online behavior and culture. It involves observation and analysis of interactions, content, and behavioral patterns within online communities, such as discussion forums, social networks, or other online platforms. Netnographic researchers use data generated from online activities to understand digital culture (Kozinets, 2019). In addition to online data collection, this research also obtains data from offline sources, including books, journals, and printed comics. This approach enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study by integrating data from various online and offline sources.

C. Result and Discussion

The narrative and implementation of early Islamic comic preaching

Islamic comics are one of the comics that color Indonesia's comic industry. Definitively, Islamic comics have not yet acquired a universally agreed-upon meaning, but their identity is transformative. Islamic comics have the ability to change the longstanding notion that comics are not educational and can harm adolescent education. These comics emerge from the tension between the prohibition of creating *tashwir* (living images) and the continuous evolution of visual language brought about by the modern era, making them unique and specific units (Salim, n.d.).

Islamic comics are considered a step towards presenting Islamic values. They are also utilized as alternative reading materials for young people amidst the massive variety of comics with various stories. Thus, Islamic comics are comics that contain fictional or non-fictional stories aimed at imparting Islamic values and are packaged with images that align with the Islamic ethos.

Islamic comics in Indonesia have existed since long before the New Order era. Around 1958, there was a comic titled "Taman Firdaus" (Paradise Garden). It tells the story of two boys named Saleh and Karma who have very different personalities. True to its name, Saleh possesses good qualities, while Karma possesses the opposite. This comic was written by KT Ahmar and illustrated by Ruchijat, published by PT Melodi.



Image 1: Cover and Content of "Firdaus" Comic Published in 1958

The evolution of Islamic comics in Indonesia is intricately tied to the era of the New Order government. The dynamic positioning of Islam experienced fluctuations, ranging from conflicts to attempts at reconciliation. Similarly, the emergence, disappearance, and resurgence of Islamic comics were closely intertwined with the shifting political landscape of Islam during that

period. The ruling government of the time (New Order) engaged in oppression and suppression measures, including the dismantling of the political influence of Masyumi members, the consolidation of Islamic parties into a single entity, the abolition of school holidays during Ramadan, the prohibition of wearing Muslim attire for students and Muslim women in public spaces, as well as the restriction of campus activities, among others (Karim dkk., 1999). This indicates that the political and economic developments during the New Order regime led to the increasing alienation of the Muslim community.

This is where the presence of Islamic comics captures and visually explains the social anxieties experienced by the Muslim community in Indonesia. Although Islamic comics during the New Order era mostly depicted mystical and afterlife themes, the post-New Order era strongly advocated for Islamic comic artists to adapt to the ever-changing environment. In a comic, narrative elements play a crucial role. Quoting Bonneff (1998:7), comics, as a form of literature through images, emphasize the importance of narrative in a comic. The

strength of the narrative expresses the quality, impact, and value of a comic. Similarly, in Islamic comics, narrative plays an essential role by providing background information about visuals that may not be understood by the readers. (Soenarto, 2009).

They also employ rhetoric to emphasize to readers the moral lessons that should be learned from the sequence of visuals. There are two contexts that significantly influence the narrative in Indonesian Islamic comic books. First, the period from 1965 to 1979, and second is the period after 1997. According to B.J. Boland, during both periods, Indonesia experienced significant political upheaval. There was fear that Islamic political parties would take over power (Soenarto, 2009).

During the early period, most of the narratives in comic books adapted local folklore and myths, leading comic artists to rely on the local knowledge of these stories (Barnard dkk., 2007). Subsequently, there were narratives about the arrival of Islam in Java, tales depicting the struggles of the Prophet, the greatness of the Prophet and Allah's saints, and stories of repentance from

those who had gone astray (Supomo, 1976).

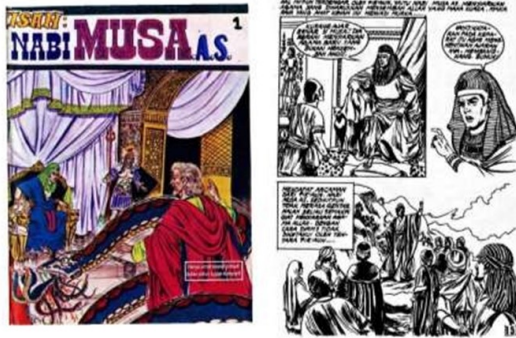


Image 2: Islamic Comic Narrating Stories of the Prophets

The narrative in early Islamic comic books was often utilized in the Islamization of Java, incorporating legends, myths, folklore, and semi-historical accounts. There were many interpretations and variations of the same stories from chronicles (babad), wayang stories, and oral traditions. One of the most renowned is the story of the Wali Songo (nine saints) who were tasked with spreading Islam in Java during the 14th to 16th centuries. Their achievements successfully transitioned from local folklore to popular media (Fox, 1999).

The Islamic comic of the Wali Songo narrates the journey of the nine saints of Allah (Sunan Gresik, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Giri, Sunan

Kalijaga, Sunan Muria, and Sunan Gunung Jati) in spreading Islam across the island of Java during the 15th and 16th centuries. In palace chronicles (babad), they are believed to be semi-historical Sufi figures endowed with magical powers, leading the Javanese kings and their followers to embrace Islam.

In the comic, they are depicted as heroes in spreading Islam. Soenarto refers to them as 'dakwah warriors', emphasizing the heroic aspects possessed by the nine saints in their preaching efforts. Through the narrative, they seek to provide a portrayal of good leadership alongside centralization under the New Order regime. This comic reminds readers of past stories of just leadership.

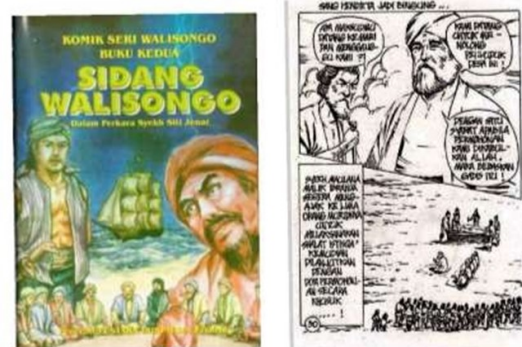


Image 3: Islamic Comic Narrating the Journey of the Wali Songo in Spreading Islam in Java

Next, a highly popular narrative in early Islamic comic books is one that depicts what happens to people in the afterlife. These comic books aim to frighten readers by providing graphic depictions of various types of punishments for those who fail to fulfill their religious obligations. This type of narrative employs the most aggressive approach in conveying its message (Soenarto, 2009). For instance, these narratives might depict images of hands being severed as punishment for theft, tongues being severed for lying, and punishments for children who disobey their parents, among others. The portrayal of hell in these comics is more prevalent compared to that of paradise. It is conceivable that the visual representation of hell is more captivating to readers' imaginations. The depiction of naked bodies being burned and tortured is not censored and may be deemed as indecorous. However, comic artists assert that their intention is solely to convey the agony experienced by sinners.



Image 4: Early Islamic Comic Narrating Punishments of the Grave

The application of preaching in early Islamic comics is characterized by a system of reward and punishment. Some stories in these comics illustrate the cause and effect of human actions in the world. The reward and punishment system is capable of shaping morality, where good deeds will be rewarded with paradise while evil deeds will be punished with hellfire. This system is considered an authority used to enforce obedience. Morality is built solely based on authoritative, one-way consequences, emphasizing obedience.

Popular Culture and Encounters with Islam

The influx of various forms and varieties of global culture originating from foreign countries such as America, Europe, Japan, China, and Korea has, in

certain positions, influenced the format and content of popular culture (film, music, television, comics) in the homeland (Ida, 2019). Indeed, the presence of popular culture has become acculturated with Islam in Indonesia. However, some Muslims experience tension between their faith and their lives in the modern world. Some believe in being devout Muslims who can adapt to modernity, while others reject it. On one hand, they enjoy music, movies, and television, but they also believe that the presence of popular culture, especially from the West, has damaged morality.

At the same time, religious authorities demonstrate an increasingly accommodating and populist attitude towards popular culture (Wilford, 2019). The encounter between Islam and popular culture can be traced back to the 1990s. Since then, Islam has become both a producer and consumer of popular culture. Islam is associated with wealth, icons of modernity, and urban lifestyles. For example, the phenomenon of the hijab has become a trend among highly educated urban women, unlike previously when it was primarily seen

among older individuals in rural areas (Weintraub, 2011).

Indeed, even media outlets previously deemed to have negative impacts have adapted to become mediums of preaching. Their presence has enhanced the development of preaching in Indonesia. These popular media platforms can facilitate preaching models that are readily accepted by the general audience. Such methods include writings (Arnez, 2009), music (Frederick, 1982), movies and soap operas (Sasono, 2010), comics, etc. On television, one can find Islamic-themed programs such as preaching programs, talent competitions packaged within reality shows, and even Islamic soap operas and films.

The presence of foreign culture through popular media represents a form of modernity that leads us to understand Islam as a living practice rather than a separation between literalist and liberal, urban and rural, pure and hybrid, and several other polarities. Indeed, the presence of popular culture has even become part of the resurgence of Islamization. Forms of Islam mediated by the masses, mostly targeted towards

urban communities, have become key in Islamization in Indonesia (Weintraub, 2011).

The influence of the Korean Wave on the visual aspects of Islamic comics

The Korean Wave phenomenon is increasingly spreading in Indonesian society, especially among young people. Particularly, the booming popularity of Korean dramas, further amplified by applications like Webtoon, has heightened the allure of Korean-manhwa or comics. The proliferation of Webtoons in Indonesia has influenced the format, content, and visuals of comics, eventually adopted by local comic artists.

The fondness of fans for Korean culture has given rise to a new phenomenon in the context of cultural consumption in society. Meanwhile, young Indonesian comic artists are attempting to respond to this trend by presenting local Islamic content adapted from Korean visuals. On the other hand, comics on the Webtoon platform follow the trend of visual style that adjusts to the tastes preferred by the market. Market preferences constantly depend on

the genres in demand, which often change at any given moment.



Image 5: A snippet of the comic 'Threejabers' on Webtoon

The illustration style used in webtoons tends to feature simple and smooth lines, with neatly arranged panels and text balloons making the comics comfortable to read. The text content displayed in the speech bubbles is straightforward and effectively conveys the visual information presented through the illustrations. Furthermore, the story concepts designed by each comic artist serve as a turning point for the Indonesian comic world.

Moreover, the visual adaptation from the Korean Wave also significantly influences the creation of characters in Islamic comics. Characters in these comics often possess visual characteristics resembling those in Korean dramas or manhwa. For

example, expressive facial expressions and fashionable clothing often form integral parts of these characters, reflecting direct influences from the Korean entertainment industry.

Additionally, the stories in Islamic comics sometimes adopt popular story elements from Korean dramas, such as complex romantic conflicts and emotionally rich narratives. However, amidst the engaging storytelling, comic artists also incorporate preaching messages aimed at providing inspiration and moral guidance to readers. Through the characters they create, comic artists strive to convey Islamic values subtly yet effectively.

Thus, the stories in Islamic comics serve not only as mere entertainment but also as a means to spread messages of goodness and truth in a relaxed and enjoyable environment. The combination of popular story elements from Korean dramas with preaching messages is expected to reach and positively influence readers, especially the younger generation actively consuming popular content.

An example of this is the comic "Metamorphosis," which tells the

journey of a teenager's hijrah (spiritual journey) who ultimately chooses to wear the hijab. It utilizes a softer preaching delivery method. The preaching model used is in the form of a narrative or called the Narrative preaching model. This indicates a shift from normative preaching to narrative preaching. In addition to the visual aspect, the narrative preaching model in comics emphasizes the use of written language formed into a story.

Da'wah through art aims to be didactic, encouraging readers to live according to Islamic teachings and avoid worldly sins. Comic creators use religious symbolism and advocate ways to become a good Muslim. Typically, the characters depicted in comics are young people, establishing a close relationship with the readers.

The freedom of access to web comics has brought about new preachers

In the ever-evolving digital era, the freedom of access to creative content is increasingly in the spotlight. One interesting phenomenon arising from this freedom is the emergence of new preachers through the medium of web comics. Web comics have become a

platform for a new generation of preachers to convey religious messages in creative and engaging ways.

Web comics offer a wide and easily accessible platform for preachers. With the widespread availability of the internet, readers can easily search for and access web comics of various genres and themes (Ohk, 2013). This provides an opportunity for preachers to reach a broader audience, including the younger generation that is increasingly interconnected digitally (Latif dkk., 2022).

One of the main advantages of web comics is their flexibility in conveying religious messages. Preachers can utilize various narrative and visual styles to explain religious concepts in an engaging and easily understandable manner. Thus, web comics not only serve as entertainment but also as effective means of religious education.

Technological advancements have also expanded the reach of religious preaching through web comics. With interactive features and social media integration, readers can directly interact with preachers and discuss religious issues addressed in the comics. This

creates an inclusive environment and allows for various perspectives and thoughts to be conveyed and discussed.

However, behind all its positive potential, web comics also pose some challenges. One of them is the issue of validity and authenticity of the information presented. Therefore, it is important for readers to exercise discernment in evaluating and filtering information received through web comics. Overall, the freedom of access to web comics has opened the door for the emergence of new, creative, and innovative preachers. By utilizing this platform wisely, preachers can reach more people and disseminate religious messages in relevant and meaningful ways in this digital era (Ilmi, 2023).

Webtoon, a form of digital comics published online, has become one of the most popular media among the younger generation. The openness and freedom of access offered by the webtoon platform have opened doors for creators to deliver religious messages in engaging and innovative ways (Lubis, 2021).

Furthermore, this phenomenon demonstrates how social media and digital platforms empower individuals to

be both producers and consumers of information simultaneously. It creates equality in access and distribution of information, where anyone, regardless of age or background, can play a role in spreading preaching messages.

Young people are also seen as entities with great potential to develop and contribute to society socially. They tend to have a high adaptability to technological changes, thus possessing the ability to take initiatives and utilize new media as a means of preaching. This shifts the traditional paradigm where preaching messages are conveyed conventionally, providing a more dynamic and creative alternative.

With the freedom of access and creativity afforded by social media and digital platforms, the younger generation, who may have previously been limited in the scope of preaching messages, now have the opportunity to actively participate in spreading religious values. They are not just consumers but also producers of content that can inspire and influence others in understanding and practicing religious teachings in a relevant and timely manner.

D. Conclusion

This research explores the changes and evolution in Islamic preaching methods through comic media, particularly in the context of transitioning from traditional print formats to modern digital platforms. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, including interviews with practitioners and netnography of reader communities, this study aims to understand how Islamic comics have adapted to technological and contemporary cultural changes.

The main findings of this research highlight narrative and visual shifts in Islamic comics, alongside the increased utilization of digital platforms such as webtoons. It was found that Islamic comic writers and illustrators have integrated elements from popular culture, particularly the Korean Wave, into their works to attract the interest of young readers and broaden the reach of preaching.

Furthermore, this research also underscores the significant role of popular media, especially webtoons, in facilitating discussions and dissemination of religious values

among the younger generation. Through these platforms, preaching messages can be delivered in engaging ways and easily accessed by a wide audience.

Overall, this research asserts that adaptation to digital platforms is a crucial step in maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of Islamic preaching in the modern era. By leveraging technological advancements and interacting with contemporary culture, Islamic comics can continue to serve as effective means of disseminating religious teachings and moral values to the digitally interconnected younger generation.

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