

Visual Da'wah In The Documentary Film *Senja Geunaseh Sayang*: A Rhetorical Analysis of Islamic Messages In The Digital Era

Azhari

UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh

Email: kutagle@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received 09/03, 2026

Revised 06/04, 2026

Accepted 30/04, 2026

Keywords:

Visual Da'wah

Documentary

Rhetoric

Senja Geunaseh Sayang

ABSTRACT

The transformation of digital communication has changed the pattern of receiving religious messages among the younger generation. Conventional da'wah that tends to be formal, verbal, and normative is increasingly experiencing challenges in reaching audiences who are used to visual and emotional experiences. This study aims to analyze the construction of da'wah rhetoric in the documentary film *Senja Geunaseh Sayang* and evaluate its effectiveness as a visual da'wah medium in the digital era. The research uses a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative-descriptive-analytical approach. The method of analysis integrates Aristotle's rhetorical theory (ethos, pathos, logos), Roland Barthes' semiotics, and modern visual rhetorical concepts. The results of the study show that film builds the dominance of persuasion through pathos (spiritual emotions), strengthened by ethos (the moral authority of the elderly as authentic figures) and logos (implicit normative arguments about *birrul walidain*). Visual symbols such as twilight, empty space, and silence form an existential metaphor about mortality and family responsibilities. The study concluded that visual da'wah through documentaries is more effective in touching the consciousness of the digital generation because it works through emotional experiences and personal reflection, rather than mere normative instruction.

Transformasi komunikasi digital telah mengubah pola penerimaan pesan keagamaan di kalangan generasi muda. Dakwah konvensional yang cenderung formal, verbal, dan normatif semakin mengalami tantangan dalam menjangkau audiens yang terbiasa dengan pengalaman visual dan emosional. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi retorika dakwah dalam film dokumenter *Senja Geunaseh Sayang* serta mengevaluasi efektivitasnya sebagai medium dakwah visual di era digital. Penelitian menggunakan paradigma konstruktivis dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-analitis. Metode analisis mengintegrasikan teori retorika Aristoteles (ethos, pathos, logos), semiotika Roland Barthes, dan konsep retorika visual modern. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film membangun dominasi persuasi melalui pathos (emosi spiritual), diperkuat oleh ethos (otoritas moral lansia sebagai figur autentik) dan logos (argumentasi normatif implisit tentang *birrul walidain*). Simbol visual seperti senja, ruang kosong, dan kesunyian membentuk metafora eksistensial tentang kefanaan dan tanggung jawab keluarga. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa dakwah visual melalui film dokumenter lebih efektif menyentuh kesadaran generasi digital karena bekerja melalui pengalaman emosional dan refleksi personal, bukan instruksi normatif semata.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation in the last two decades has fundamentally changed the way humans communicate, access information, and build meaning. The presence of social media, video-sharing platforms, and on-demand content ecosystems has given birth to fast, visual, and emotional experience-based information consumption patterns. The digital generation—especially Generation Z and millennials—tend to be more responsive to narrative, visual, and authentic content compared to formal and one-way communication (Hjarvard, 2021; Lim, 2020).

In this context, the practice of Islamic da'wah faces epistemological as well as methodological challenges. Da'wah is no longer only understood as the delivery of normative messages through lectures or sermons, but also as a communication process that must be able to adapt to the character of contemporary audiences. Conventional da'wah models that are linear, verbal, and instructive are often perceived as less effective in reaching the digital generation who prefer dialogical, reflective, and experience-based approaches (Campbell, H. A. & Tsuria, 2021).

The main problem in contemporary da'wah does not lie in the substance of Islamic teachings, but in the communication strategy and medium of delivery. Values such as *birrul walidain* (devotion to one's parents), affection, and family responsibility remain of strong normative relevance in Islamic teachings. However, without an appropriate communication approach, these values have the potential to lose persuasiveness in the midst of competitive and disruptive digital information flows (Bunt, 2022).

Within this framework, visual media—especially documentaries—emerged as a strategic alternative in contemporary da'wah practices. In contrast to lectures that are declarative and normative, documentaries work through representations of reality, visual

narratives, and emotional experiences. It does not just "say", but "show" (Nichols, 2020). This approach allows for emotional engagement and deeper personal reflection in the audience.

The documentary film *Senja Geunaseh Sayang* produced by the Aceh Documentary Competition (ADC) in 2016 is a concrete example of this kind of visual da'wah practice. This film represents the lives of the elderly at UPTD Rumoh Sejahtera Geunaseh Sayang, Banda Aceh, by showing the reality of loneliness, longing, prayer, and hope for a mother for her child. Interestingly, this film does not explicitly convey postulates or verses of the Qur'an, but builds religious awareness through visual symbols, emotional atmospheres, and everyday narratives.

This approach shows a shift in the paradigm of da'wah from normative communication to affective and symbolic communication. From a rhetorical perspective, this strategy can be analyzed through the integration of elements of pathos (emotion), ethos (credibility), and logos (rationality), which are no longer present in purely verbal form, but are also manifested in visual and cinematic structures (Foss, 2022). In addition, through a semiotic perspective, visual elements such as twilight, empty space, and silence can be understood as signs that establish denotative and connotative meanings about the transience of life and moral responsibility towards parents (Chandler, 2022).

Therefore, it is important to examine scientifically how the documentary *Senja Geunaseh Sayang* builds the construction of da'wah rhetoric through visual mediums. The fundamental question that arises is: how does the structure of the visual rhetoric in the film produce a persuasive effect? How do symbols and visual narratives shape religious meaning? And how effective is it in reaching the awareness of the digital generation?

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of contemporary da'wah studies, especially in the integration between rhetoric, semiotics, and visual media, as well as a practical contribution in formulating da'wah strategies that are more adaptive to the development of digital technology.

2. METHOD

This research uses a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as the result of the construction of meaning formed through symbolic interactions, language, and communication practices. Within this framework, film is not understood as an objective representation of reality, but rather as an audio-visual text that actively constructs meaning

through narrative structure, visual choices, and representation strategies. The constructivist approach allows researchers to uncover how da'wah messages are produced, structured, and interpreted in the context of culture and digital media (J.W., 2023)(Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, 2023).

This study uses an interpretive qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. This approach places film as a text that is open to interpretation, where meaning is not singular, but rather is generated through the interaction between text, context, and interpreter. The object of the research is the documentary *film Senja Geunaseh Sayang*, which is analyzed as a visual da'wah medium that contains rhetorical and symbolic constructions.

The data collection technique is carried out through *the close viewing* method, which is repeated and in-depth screening of the film to identify significant elements in the audio-visual text. The data collected included narrative structure, dialogue (if any), visual composition, use of color and lighting, character expression, visual symbols, and cinematic rhythms such as tempo and duration of scenes. This technique allows researchers to capture details of meaning that are not always apparent in initial observations and understand the relationship between elements in building the overall message (Rose, 2022).

Data analysis was carried out through two complementary theoretical frameworks. First, Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory is used to identify persuasive strategies in film through three main elements: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* is analyzed through character representations and visually emerging moral credibility constructions, such as elderly figures representing the authority of experience and authenticity. *Pathos* is studied through the management of emotions that are built through visual atmosphere, expression, music, and dramaturgy of scenes. Meanwhile, *logos* are identified through implicit argumentation patterns formed from narrative plots, situational contrasts, and cause-and-effect relationships presented in films (Foss, 2022).

Second, semiotic analysis is used to uncover the symbolic meanings contained in the visual elements of the film. This approach refers to Roland Barthes' concept of semiotics which distinguishes between denotative (literal meaning) and connotative (cultural and ideological meaning). In this study, every visual element such as objects, spaces, gestures, and moments of silence is treated as a sign that has the potential for layered meaning. This analysis aims to uncover how visual symbols in films form representations of Islamic values,

especially the concept of *birrul walidain*, through implicit and reflective ways (Chandler, 2022).

The analysis process is carried out in stages, starting from data reduction by selecting key scenes that are relevant to the focus of the research, then continued with categorization based on rhetorical and semiotic elements. Furthermore, the researcher conducted an in-depth interpretation to relate the visual findings to the context of da'wah and the characteristics of digital communication. The validity of the data is maintained through observation diligence (*prolonged engagement*) and consistency of interpretation based on the theoretical framework used (Nowell, L. S. et al., 2020).

By integrating rhetorical and semiotic analysis, this method allows for a comprehensive reading of film as a visual da'wah medium. This approach is relevant to the dynamics of communication in the digital age that emphasizes emotional experiences, visual narratives, and personal reflection as the main strategies in building persuasion and religious awareness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Film Language as a Da'wah Communication System

The findings of the study show that *the documentary film Senja Geunaseh Sayang* functions as a sign-based da'wah communication system that works through visual, auditory, and narrative elements. From the perspective of visual studies, film is not just a representation of reality, but a construction of meaning built through cinematic choices such as image composition, camera distance, rhythm, and sound (Rose, 2022).

The use of *long shots* that place the elderly in a large and quiet space denotatively represents physical conditions, but connotatively builds the meaning of social alienation. In contrast, *close-ups* on facial expressions present emotional closeness that encourages the audience's empathy. This is in line with the findings of communication neuroscience studies that show that facial expressions are able to trigger empathic responses through *mirror neurons'* mechanisms, thereby strengthening the affective engagement of the audience (Ferrari & Rizzolatti, 2021).

The slow pace of editing and the use of silence became a significant rhetorical strategy. In the context of fast-paced digital culture, slow tempo actually creates a space for deep reflection. Silence in film does not represent the absence of a message, but rather becomes a medium of contemplation that allows the viewer to construct meaning

internally. Thus, film language in the context of da'wah works through the integration of three main dimensions: visual as sign, emotion as a mover, and narrative as a form of meaning.

b. Ethos Construction: Moral Authority in the Representation of the Elderly

The analysis shows that the ethos construction in this film is not built through formal authorities such as clerics or religious institutions, but through the representation of the elderly as authentic moral figures. This strategy shifts the source of credibility from structural authority to an existential authority based on life experience.

The observational approach used—with minimal narrative intervention—reinforces the impression of authenticity. In contemporary rhetorical theory, credibility built through the honesty of visual representations tends to be more effective in building audience trust compared to explicit claims of authority (Foss, 2022). The elderly in the film are not just objects of representation, but present as subjects who have a voice and experience.

In addition, culturally and religiously, the elderly have a strong symbolic position in society, especially in the context of the value of *birrul walidain*. The representation of the elderly living in solitude creates a contrast between ideal norms and social reality, thus reinforcing their moral authority as a "living argument". Thus, *the ethos* in this film is implicit, organic, and based on the resonance of cultural values.

c. Construct *Pathos*: Emotional Dramaturgy as a Key Strategy

The results of the study show that *pathos* is the most dominant persuasion strategy in this film. Emotional dramaturgy is built through a combination of visuals, rhythm, and sound that results in a profound affective experience.

The use of slow tempo, long silence, and minimalist background music creates a melancholy atmosphere that is not excessive. This approach is in line with the concept of *affective storytelling* in visual media, where emotions are built through subtlety, not dramatization (Plantinga, 2021). *Close-ups* on the facial expressions of the elderly reinforce the emotional resonance, so that the audience not only understands the situation cognitively, but also feels it personally.

The dominance of *pathos* shows a paradigm shift in da'wah from an instructive approach to an affective approach. The message of *birrul walidain* is not conveyed normatively, but is internalized through emotional experience. This strategy is relevant

to the character of the digital generation who are more responsive to emotional narratives than formal communication (Hjarvard, 2021).

d. The Construction of the Logos: Implicit Moral Argumentation

In contrast to conventional da'wah that features explicit arguments, *the logos* in this film are built implicitly through narrative structure and visual contrast. The film presents the reality of the elderly living in solitude as an empirical premise that is contrary to the normative value of *birrul walidain*.

This contrast between ideal values and reality forms a moral syllogism composed by the spectators themselves. In a constructivist perspective, meaning is not imposed from the outside, but is constructed through the process of individual interpretation (J.W., 2023). Symbols such as monotonous routines, empty spaces, and social alienation reinforce implicit cause-and-effect relationships.

Thus, *the logos* in this film work through narrative and symbols, not through verbal argumentation. This approach results in more reflective persuasion because it provides space for the audience to arrive at moral conclusions independently.

e. Semiotic Analysis: Twilight, Silence, and the Metaphor of Mortality

The semiotic approach reveals that the visual elements in the film serve as signs with layered meanings. Twilight, as the main sign, denotatively represents the time leading up to night, but connotatively symbolizes the final phase of life and the limitation of time. This meaning is reinforced by the consistent use of low light in some scenes.

Loneliness serves as a sign of the absence of social and emotional relationships. In the context of film, silence is not only an acoustic condition, but a symbol of the disconnection of family relationships. Similarly, empty space becomes a visual metaphor for the loss of family presence in the lives of the elderly.

This analysis is in line with semiotics theory which states that meaning does not lie in individual signs, but in the relationships between signs in a representation system (Chandler, 2022). Thus, the film constructs the metaphor of mortality and moral responsibility implicitly through a network of interconnected visual symbols.

f. Synthesis of Ethos–Pathos–Logos in Visual Da'wah

The main findings of this study show that the effectiveness of da'wah in film lies in the integration between *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. The three work synergistically in forming a complete persuasion structure.

Ethos provides a foundation of credibility through the authenticity of the representation of the elderly. *Pathos* serves as the main driver that builds emotional engagement. While *logos* reinforce the message through implicit argumentation structured in the narrative. This integration produces a da'wah model that is not patronizing, but invites reflection.

In the perspective of visual rhetoric, the balance of these three elements allows the message to be conveyed in a more humanist and contextual way (Foss, 2022). This model is relevant to the needs of da'wah communication in the digital era which demands a more adaptive and dialogical approach.

g. The Effectiveness of Visual Da'wah in the Digital Era

The results of the study confirm that visual da'wah through documentary films has high effectiveness in the context of digital communication. Cognitively, visual information is processed faster and easier to remember than verbal information (Rose, 2022). This makes film an efficient medium in conveying moral messages.

Affectively, audiovisual narratives are able to build stronger empathy than conventional lectures. Emotions generated through visual experiences tend to be more embedded in long-term memory. In addition, digital distribution allows da'wah messages to reach a wider audience without geographical boundaries (Bunt, 2022).

Thus, the effectiveness of visual da'wah lies in its ability to integrate cognitive, emotional, and technological dimensions in one medium. The film does not replace conventional da'wah, but complements it with an approach that is more in line with the character of the digital generation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the documentary film *Senja Geunaseh Sayang* represents a contemporary da'wah model that moves from the normative-verbal paradigm to the visual-experiential paradigm. Da'wah no longer relies on the explicit delivery of evidence, but rather is built through a visual rhetorical construction that integrates *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in a subtle yet persuasive narrative unit.

Key findings suggest that *pathos* is becoming a dominant element in shaping religious consciousness, by presenting a profound emotional experience through visual expression, slow rhythms, and an atmosphere of silence. The *ethos* is built organically through the authenticity of the representation of the elderly as moral figures who have

cultural and religious legitimacy, while the logos is present in the form of implicit arguments that are structured through the contrast between the ideal values of the *birrul walidain* and the social reality that is displayed. The integration of these three elements produces a form of persuasion that is not patronizing, but invites personal reflection.

In addition, semiotic analysis shows that visual symbols such as twilight, silence, and empty space serve as a device of meaning that constructs metaphors of mortality, alienation, and moral responsibility. The meaning of da'wah is not conveyed directly, but is produced through the relationship between signs that form the audience's interpretive experience. Thus, film works as a symbolic text that allows for a deeper internalization of religious values.

The novelty of this research lies in the conceptual integration between Aristotle's classical rhetoric (ethos–pathos–logos) and visual semiotics in the context of documentary-based Islamic da'wah. In contrast to previous da'wah research that tended to focus on the analysis of the content of verbal messages or the effectiveness of media in general, this study offers an interdisciplinary approach that positions film as a complex visual rhetorical system.

In addition, this study introduces the concept of "experiential da'wah", which is a da'wah model that works through emotional experiences and personal reflection, rather than through direct normative instruction. This concept is a new contribution to the study of da'wah, especially in responding to the transformation of communication in the digital era which demands a more humanistic, symbolic, and participatory approach.

REFERENCES

- Bunt, G. R. (2022). *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Campbell, H. A., & Tsuria, R. (2021). Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media. *New Media & Society*, 23(1), 1–17.
- Chandler, D. (2022). *Semiotics: The Basics* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2023). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ferrari, P. F., & Rizzolatti, G. (2021). Mirror Neuron Research: The Past and the Future. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*.
- Foss, S. K. (2022). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (6th ed.). Waveland

Press.

Hjarvard, S. (2021). The Mediatization of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change. *Culture and Religion*, 22(1), 1–17.

J.W., C. (2023). *Research Design Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan Campuran*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Lim, M. (2020). Freedom to Hate: Social Media, Algorithmic Enclaves, and the Rise of Tribal Nationalism in Indonesia. *Critical Asian Studies*, 52(1), 1–17.

Nichols, B. (2020). *Introduction to Documentary* (3rd ed.). Indiana University Press.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2020). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19(1), 1–13.

Plantinga, C. (2021). *Screen Stories and Moral Understanding*. Oxford University Press.

Rose, G. (2022). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (5th ed.). SAGE Publication.