JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Deconstructing Surah At-Tahrim, Verse 9: Boundaries of Harsh Preaching in the Case of Abuya Mama Ghufron on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the interpretation of *Surah At-Tahrim*, verse 9 through a deconstructive lens, addressing the growing prevalence of firm preaching in contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly in selected sermons delivered on YouTube. The core issue lies in the perceived dissonance between traditional Islamic principles of preaching, which emphasise wisdom and compassion, and the rise of more rigid, confrontational da'wah styles that may risk shaping public perceptions of Islam negatively. The study critically explores how classical Qur'anic exegesis, particularly that of Ibn Kathir, conceptualises firmness in preaching and contrasts this with rhetorical strategies observed in modern digital sermons. Using Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction and a thematic interpretive method, this research analyses the content, language, and theological implications of these sermons within the framework of Qur'anic hermeneutics. The findings reveal that while classical exegesis affirms the necessity of firmness in defending Islamic values, it also incorporates principles of contextual wisdom and justice. These elements are not always consistently reflected in certain contemporary preaching approaches. This study contributes to the field of Islamic communication by offering a contextual critique of digital religious expression and proposing a balanced ethical framework for da'wah in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: At-Tahrim 9, Islamic preaching styles, deconstruction, online religious discourse

Received: 5 April 2025, **Accepted**:10 July 2025, **Published**: 30 July 2025

Introduction

The phenomenon of harsh preaching has become a widely discussed topic in contemporary Muslim society (A. Farida et al., 2021; Samsudin, 2021). Preaching, which was initially intended to spread Islamic teachings with wisdom and gentleness, is increasingly being delivered in firm and even harsh tones (Cholis, 2022; Syalafiyah & Harianto, 2020). This trend raises concerns, as it can lead to misunderstandings about Islam as a religion of love and tolerance. The shift in preaching style is often driven by the desire to demonstrate firmness in upholding the truth. However, this approach also has the potential to alienate the audience, creating resistance rather than fostering understanding.

Journal of Communication, Language and Culture
doi: https://doi.org/10.33093/jclc.2025.5.2.11
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One case that attracted significant public attention was Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermon, which went viral on social media due to its firm tone and was considered by many to have exceeded the bounds of wise preaching (Suganda et al., 2024). The controversy intensified when Abuya Mama Ghufron claimed to possess the ability to communicate with non-human beings, such as ants and jinns, referencing the powers attributed to the Prophet Solomon (AS). These claims elicited mixed reactions, with some viewing them as spiritual insight and others as a deviation from accepted Islamic teachings.

Abuya Mama Ghufron's confrontational preaching style and extraordinary claims have prompted widespread debate about the boundaries of da'wah and the principles it should uphold (Alaudin, 2023; Suganda et al., 2024). Many people question whether such an approach effectively conveys religious messages or whether it fosters misunderstanding and negative perceptions of Islam. In an increasingly pluralistic society, a style of da'wah that neglects the social and psychological conditions of its audience may create rejection rather than acceptance.

This case reflects a broader shift in preaching towards more confrontational styles, with less attention paid to the prophetic principles of wisdom and compassion. Some argue that sermons delivered in loud, harsh tones are ineffective and risk projecting an image of Islam as intolerant and exclusive. This is particularly concerning in the context of social media, where content can spread rapidly and shape the perceptions of a broad and diverse audience.

The controversy surrounding Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons prompted responses from clerics and religious figures who argued that his approach contradicts the essence of Islamic preaching, which prioritises gentleness and compassion. They emphasised the importance of delivering da'wah in a way that is capable of touching the heart, not instilling fear or aversion. Excessive harshness can distance the preacher from the audience and reduce the effectiveness of conveying Islam's message, which is meant to promote peace and mercy.

Nevertheless, some individuals support the hard preaching approach, arguing that it is necessary to counteract the growing prevalence of societal deviance and moral decline. They contend that soft preaching is sometimes ineffective in defending Islamic values. However, this view often overlooks the fact that harsh preaching, when disconnected from social and cultural realities, may provoke backlash and resistance.

The case of Abuya Mama Ghufron also serves as a cautionary example of how confrontational preaching can spark controversy and create division among Muslims. The public outcry eventually led to an apology from Abuya Mama Ghufron for some of his statements, indicating that society does not uniformly accept such approaches and that they can have unintended consequences.

The rise of harsh preaching has often been supported by interpretations of classical *tafsir*, particularly Ibn Kathir's commentary on Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 (Rahmadini, 2022). This verse instructs believers to admonish hypocrites and disbelievers with severity, and some preachers cite it as justification for adopting a firm or even confrontational preaching style (Choerunissya, 2021). However, such interpretations must be understood in their historical context, and their application in modern societies with vastly different social and cultural dynamics requires critical reconsideration.

Despite the public discourse surrounding harsh preaching, academic research that critically examines the intersection of classical *tafsir*, digital media preaching, and deconstructive analysis remains limited. Previous studies have largely focused on the rhetorical or ethical dimensions of preaching in the media, without fully exploring how verses such as Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 are reinterpreted in contemporary da'wah that veers into extremity. Very few studies have investigated how traditional exegesis is reshaped within highly pluralistic and digital environments. This study aims to address that gap by offering a deconstructive analysis of classical *tafsir* and evaluating its impact on the public perception of Islam in digital spaces.

This research adopts a content analysis approach, focusing on Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons that have gained widespread attention on platforms such as YouTube. It critically examines the content of these sermons to identify recurring themes, language choices, and rhetorical strategies linked to harsh preaching. These features are then analysed in relation to classical interpretations of Surah At-Tahrim,

verse 9, with reference to scholars such as Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari, and Al-Razi. By comparing these digital sermons with traditional *tafsir*, this study evaluates whether Abuya Mama Ghufron's preaching aligns with or deviates from established Islamic teachings on firmness in da'wah. The analysis also considers the sociocultural impact of such sermons on the Muslim community in Medan, particularly how digital media amplifies the reach and influence of religious discourse and shapes public understanding of Islam.

In contemporary Muslim societies, the trend towards harsh preaching needs to be critically re-evaluated to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes and creating misunderstandings. As social media becomes the primary medium for religious communication, preachers must adopt styles that are wiser and more adaptable to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Sermons that are aggressive in tone or contain controversial claims not only risk alienating listeners but may also strengthen misconceptions of Islam as an intolerant religion.

It is vital to reconsider the interpretive methods and preaching styles used by figures such as Abuya Mama Ghufron to ensure that Islamic teachings are communicated in a more inclusive and compassionate manner. A wise approach to preaching can foster deeper understanding and a stronger connection with Islamic values, rather than generating fear or hostility. This is especially critical in the digital era, where misinformation and misinterpretation are widespread.

The novelty of this study lies in its use of a deconstructive approach to Ibn Kathir's *tafsir* of Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9, analysed through the case of Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons. This research not only critiques the limitations of harsh preaching from the standpoint of classical interpretation but also examines its relevance within the context of contemporary digital da'wah, particularly in cases perceived by some as deviant. Through a thematic interpretive method, the study contributes new insights into how harsh preaching should be adapted to evolving social and cultural realities. It also underscores the role of religious authorities in maintaining a balanced approach that combines firmness with gentleness in communicating religious messages in a digital age.

Literature Review

The Concept of Firmness in Islamic Preaching

Firmness in Islamic preaching is often understood as a form of commitment to uphold the truth and protect Islamic teachings from deviation (Al Abdillah et al., 2023; Alam & Abid, 2021; Mujahidin et al., 2022; Syairozi, 2024). Classical interpretations, such as those explained by Ibn Kathir in interpreting Surah At-Tahrim verse 9, emphasize the importance of being firm against disbelievers and hypocrites, as part of preserving the purity of Islamic teachings. However, this firmness is not synonymous with violence or harshness; it must be accompanied by wisdom and prudence when delivering religious messages.

Scholars, such as Al-Tabari and Al-Razi, also stress that firmness in preaching must be contextual and adjusted to the social and cultural conditions of the local community (S. Farida & Humaidi, 2024; Fauzan & Fata, 2022; Jarudin et al., 2023). In plural societies such as Medan and other regions of North Sumatra, an overly harsh approach can lead to resistance and worsen faith. Therefore, contemporary scholars have highlighted the importance of balancing firmness and gentleness in preaching to maintain social harmony.

In the digital era, the understanding of firmness becomes increasingly complex as preaching is no longer limited to physical spaces, but also extends to platforms such as YouTube (Makhutla, 2021; Mutmainah et al., 2022). This creates new challenges in defining the boundaries of firmness in preaching, as messages delivered online can easily be misinterpreted or removed from context. The literature on digital preaching emphasizes the need to adapt preaching methods by considering a broader and more diverse audience.

Deconstructive Approach in Tafsir Analysis

The deconstructive approach, popularised by Jacques Derrida, offers a novel framework for analysing religious texts, including the *tafsir* (interpretation) of the Qur'an (Agil et al., 2024). This approach emphasises that every text contains multiple layers of meaning and can be interpreted differently depending on the social and cultural context. In this study, deconstruction is employed to examine how the *tafsir* of Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 is understood and applied in contemporary preaching practices.

In modern scholarship, deconstruction serves to challenge literal interpretations of verses that advocate firmness or severity (Alam & Abid, 2021). For example, interpreters such as Amelia et al. (2024) seek to align Qur'anic interpretation with more humanistic and pluralistic contexts (Amelia et al., 2024; Jarudin et al., 2023; Syairozi, 2024). These scholars argue that commands for firmness in Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 must be understood within their historical context and specific socio-political circumstances, rather than being used as a blanket justification for harsh preaching in all settings.

By applying the deconstructive approach, this study aims to demonstrate that harsh preaching, as exemplified by Abuya Mama Ghufron, is not merely the result of a literal reading of sacred texts. Rather, it reflects complex interactions between traditional *tafsir* and contemporary socio-political dynamics. This approach enables a more contextual interpretation of religious texts, offering insights into how Islamic teachings can address modern challenges more ethically and inclusively.

Digital Preaching and Its Challenges in the Modern Era

The literature on digital preaching highlights that social media has become a primary tool for disseminating religious messages, but also brings unique challenges (Mannerfelt, 2023; Sigmon, 2023). According to studies by (Mannerfelt, 2022), preaching on platforms such as YouTube often faces the dilemma of balancing firmness in message delivery while maintaining ethical communication that aligns with Islamic teachings. For example, Abuya Mama Ghufron used these platforms to spread his sermons, but his harsh approach sparked controversy within the community.

Digital preaching demands the adaptation of more effective communication methods (Amelia et al., 2024; Khroul, 2021; Willem & Hendriks, 2023). Unlike conventional preaching, which is face-to-face, online preaching must consider a broader and more diverse audience, in terms of cultural and religious backgrounds and levels of religious understanding. Therefore, the literature on digital preaching emphasizes the importance of using more inclusive and dialogical communication strategies to avoid misunderstandings and reinforce Islam’s message of peace in this era of globalization.

Methods

This study adopts the thematic interpretation method (tafsir maudhu’i), which is appropriate for addressing contemporary issues, such as harsh preaching, as reflected in Surah At-Tahrim verse 9 (Abidin, 2023; Fuadia et al., 2024; Sahabi & Baide, 2021). The process begins by identifying the central theme of "harsh preaching" and gathering related Qur’anic verses that address firmness and strictness in da'wah, both directly and indirectly (T. Setiawan & Faqih, 2022). These verses are then analysed by considering their *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), historical context, and alignment with the Islamic principles of wisdom (hikmah) and gentleness.

In addition to employing thematic interpretation and deconstructive analysis methods, this study incorporates a deeper contextual analysis. The analysis is not limited to primary sources such as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, classical *tafsir* texts (e.g., Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari, Al-Razi), and selected verses, but also considers the sociocultural background of the digital preaching phenomenon. In this regard, the emergence of Abuya Mama Ghufron as a digital preacher must be understood through the lens of urban Muslim dynamics, the role of social media in shaping new forms of religious authority, and public perceptions of viral sermons. This approach aims to ensure that interpretations of Qur’anic verses used in harsh preaching are analysed holistically and contextually, thereby enhancing the relevance of the findings to contemporary realities.

Beyond analysing classical exegesis, this study also incorporates a contextual analysis of the digital preaching phenomenon, specifically focusing on the sermons of Abuya Mama Ghufron on YouTube (Siregar, 2020). The analysis considers the socio-religious context of urban Muslim society in Medan, the evolving role of social media in constructing religious authority, and public perceptions of viral religious content. Thus, the interpretation offered is not merely textual but also contextual, grounded in today's sociocultural realities.

Data selection was conducted purposively by identifying Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons that had gone viral and explicitly addressed themes of religious strictness. The selection criteria included view counts, levels of public engagement, and thematic relevance to Surah At-Tahrim verse 9. To ensure the validity and theological soundness of the interpretations, the researcher consulted a Qur'anic exegesis expert from a State Islamic University, Prof. Dr. Abdullah M.Si. This expert's involvement was instrumental in verifying that the interpretations adhered to classical *tafsir* standards and maintained both academic and religious integrity.

Results and Findings

Deconstruction of the Interpretation of Surah At-Tahrim Verse 9

Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah At-Tahrim verse 9 highlights Allah's command to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to be firm and harsh toward infidels and hypocrites (Hendri, 2021). Ibn Kathir interpreted this verse as a call for the Prophet to carry out da'wah with firmness when dealing with those who opposed the teachings of Islam and tried to damage or weaken the Muslim community (Ningrum, 2023). In his interpretation, Ibn Kathir emphasized that this tough stance is not a form of hatred or aggression but rather an expression of justice and protection of Islamic teachings. According to Ibn Kathir, this firmness is an important part of the task of da'wah, especially when facing groups that are openly hostile to Islam.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ جَٰهِدِ ٱلْكُفَّارَ وَٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ وَمَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَبِئْسَ

> *O Prophet, fight the disbelievers and hypocrites and be strict with them. Their place was Jahannam and that was the worst place to return to.*

Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 reads: *"O Prophet! Fight against disbelievers and hypocrites and be tough with them. Their place is the hell of Jahannam, and it is the worst place to return"* (Arifin, 2021). This verse is traditionally interpreted as a command to wage jihad against disbelievers and hypocrites. However, through a deconstructive lens, this command can be re-examined to encompass broader dimensions of jihad, namely moral, intellectual, and spiritual struggles. Such a re-reading allows for a more inclusive and compassionate understanding that aligns with Islam's overarching values of justice and mercy. In today's context, where digital platforms amplify religious messages and shape public perception, it becomes essential to interrogate how such verses are interpreted and applied. Several interpretations and their respective contexts are presented below to be analysed and connected to contemporary realities, particularly within the framework of digital preaching and its sociocultural implications.

Table 1

Interpretations of Surah At-Tahrim Verse 9 and Their Contemporary Relevance

No	Interpreter	Main Interpretation	Current Context
1	Tabari	Tabari emphasises the urgency of the command to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to engage in jihad against disbelievers and hypocrites with firmness. He focuses on the literal meanings of the terms "fight" and "be tough", contextualising them within the socio-historical conditions of the early Muslim community.	The order for firmness can be applied in efforts to counter extremist ideology and religious deviation while maintaining the law and human rights.
2	Razi	Razi combines both literal and symbolic interpretations, viewing the verse as an injunction to uphold Islamic teachings with firmness tempered by prudence. He underscores the spiritual dimension of the command.	In today's pluralistic society, symbolic and spiritual approaches are important to build interfaith dialogue and counter narratives of hatred.
3	Zamakhsari	Approaching the verse from a Mu'tazilite perspective, Zamakhshari interprets it as a divine warning instructing the Prophet to act decisively in defending the Islamic faith. He also draws attention to the powerful linguistic structure of the verse as a form of warning to those opposing Islam.	Strong language structures are relevant to convey religious messages clearly in the digital era, while still avoiding the spread of hatred.
4	Tabatabai	In the Shia tradition, Tabatabai connects this verse to the safeguarding of Islam's purity from the infiltration of hypocritical thoughts and behaviours. He interprets the directive for harshness as a response to existential threats to the religion.	Threats to the purity of Islam can be translated as efforts to counter radicalization on social media and the spread of misleading information.
5	Maturidi	Maturidi interprets the verse as a theological directive to stand firm against threats that could endanger the unity of the Muslim ummah. He stresses the necessity of balancing firmness with gentleness to maintain communal harmony.	This balance is relevant in supporting diversity and tolerance in communities, including the use of a dialogical approach amid differences of opinion.

Al-Tabari's interpretation of Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 highlights Allah's command to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to wage jihad against disbelievers and hypocrites with firmness. Tabari emphasises the literal dimension of this command, aligning it with the socio-historical context of early Islam, when the Muslim community was still vulnerable and faced existential threats. The firmness in Tabari's exegesis is thus intended as a response to tangible dangers confronting the nascent Muslim community. In a modern context, this message may be understood as a call to combat extremist ideologies or religious deviations that endanger societal integrity, while remaining grounded in legal principles and respect for human rights.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, adopting a blend of literal and symbolic interpretation, views this verse as a directive to uphold Islamic teachings with firmness tempered by wisdom. For Razi, the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the command take precedence over its physical or militaristic implications. In today's increasingly pluralistic world, Razi's approach remains relevant in promoting interfaith dialogue, fostering tolerance, and countering hate narratives that threaten social harmony. His emphasis on ethical firmness encourages a principled yet non-aggressive response to contemporary religious challenges.

Zamakhsari's approach, with a Mütazilah background, emphasizes the use of a strong and straightforward language in this verse. He interprets the command as a divine admonition to be firm to maintain the faith of Muslims. Zamakhsari also noted the importance of effective communication in conveying the message of da'wah. In the digital era, this interpretation is relevant to developing a

strategy for religious communication that is firm but does not trigger polarisation, especially on social media, which is the main space for spreading da'wah today.

Tabatabai places particular emphasis on the importance of preserving the purity of Islamic teachings from the infiltration of hypocritical thoughts and behaviours. He views assertiveness as a necessary response to existential threats facing Islam. This interpretation remains relevant today, particularly in countering radicalisation and disinformation that frequently spread through social media. According to Tabatabai, efforts to maintain the purity of Islam must be undertaken collectively, through a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening religious education and promoting digital literacy.

Meanwhile, al-Maturidi offers a more balanced approach, highlighting the significance of firmness while maintaining gentleness. For him, a firm stance should be reserved for situations that genuinely endanger the cohesion of the Muslim community. In the context of a modern, multicultural society, this perspective supports the promotion of diversity, tolerance, and social harmony. As Maturidi suggests, firmness in da'wah can be harmonised with a dialogical and empathetic approach to engage with the realities of pluralism and differing opinions within society.

The deconstructive approach explores the instability of textual meaning and acknowledges the possibility of multiple interpretations that extend beyond a strictly literal understanding. Jacques Derrida, the founder of deconstruction, argued that every text is inherently ambiguous and can be dismantled from binary oppositions that tend to limit interpretation (Ramadoni & Bakti, 2023). Accordingly, this verse may be understood not only as a call to physical jihad, but also as a command to resist social and political hypocrisy.

In traditional interpretations, such as *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, this verse is commonly understood as an instruction to be harsh towards disbelievers and hypocrites, including through warfare and severe punishment. However, contemporary interpretations offer broader, more inclusive readings. As Musyarrofah (2023) and Prianto (2023) explain, the concept of jihad can encompass various forms of non-physical struggle, including efforts to uphold justice and truth.

Modern exegetical approaches also adopt more inclusive definitions of the terms "disbeliever" and "hypocrite." As noted by Sazali and Matondang (2023), these terms can be extended to include individuals or groups engaged in acts of oppression, injustice, or social hypocrisy, regardless of their religion or belief system. This interpretation opens the way for a more universal and contextually relevant understanding of the verse in today’s global society.

Deconstruction proposes that this verse can be interpreted in the context of resisting broader forms of injustice, including hypocrisy within political and social structures. KhosraviNik and Amer (2023) argue that jihad, as conceptualised in the Qur'an, may be understood as a struggle against structural injustices that undermine societal wellbeing. This interpretation situates jihad closer to the idea of intellectual and moral resistance, particularly in non-violent contexts.

This approach also encourages self-reflection among Muslims, urging them not to view jihad solely as armed conflict but also as an inner struggle against hypocritical tendencies within themselves. Hadzhiev (2023) reminds us that the command to wage jihad can be interpreted as a call to combat internal vices, such as desire and negative traits.

Within deconstruction, the rereading of sacred texts often considers the modern context and the social challenges faced by contemporary communities. As Duderija (2023) explains, modern jihad should be understood as an active commitment to uphold humanitarian values, social justice, and human rights wherever injustice occurs. This interpretation aligns with the need for Muslims to remain contextually aware and responsive to global challenges (Arifin, 2024). Therefore, a deconstructive reading of Surah At-Tahrim, verse 9 allows for a broader and more dynamic understanding of jihad—one that extends beyond physical warfare to encompass moral, intellectual, and social forms of resistance.

Abuya Mama Ghufron's Lecture Case

The controversy over Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons has been in the spotlight because the content of his sermons is considered to deviate from Islamic teachings and not because of his harsh tone. Many parties believe that the teachings and claims he conveys tend to be inconsistent with the basic principles of Islam. Abuya Mama Ghufron's confession about special abilities such as talking to other creatures, for example, has raised concerns among Muslims because it is considered outside the boundaries of mainstream Islamic teachings. Claims like these are considered to have the potential to mislead his followers, so his sermons have been labelled "harsh" because their content is considered inconsistent with Islamic beliefs.

Figure 1

Da'wah of Mama Ghufron on YouTube





Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons exhibit a pattern of harsh and provocative preaching, characterized by misleading claims that challenge conventional Islamic teachings. In the first video, he asserts his ability to communicate in various "languages of creatures," including the languages of ants, angels, jinns, fairies, and even worms. Such claims lack a theological foundation and appear to construct exaggerated spiritual authority over his audience. This narrative fosters the perception that he possesses exclusive access to the metaphysical realm, potentially leading followers to accept teachings that diverge from orthodox Islamic doctrine.

Statements such as "video call with the angels Munkar and Nakir" reflect extreme dramatization in his preaching approach. This terminology distorts the understanding of angels within Islamic theology, where angels are sacred entities deserving reverence and are not trivialized as being accessible through mundane means. The utilisation of such language contradicts the sanctity attributed to angels in Islamic

beliefs, undermining religious integrity, and potentially tarnishing Islam's image, particularly among less-informed audiences.

The second video escalates this confrontational rhetoric with the statement, "When Mama Ghufron is angry, even Allah is scolded." This assertion is profoundly problematic, as it suggests a position of authority over God, contravening the core Islamic principle of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), which emphasizes that no being holds power comparable to Allah. Such a statement not only offends the fundamental beliefs of Muslims, but also invites accusations of blasphemy, provoking strong reactions from the broader religious community.

Abuya Mama Ghufron's harsh preaching style has implications beyond theological distortion; it risks fracturing Muslim communities. By delivering confrontational and controversial messages, his sermons foster tensions among different Islamic groups. Rather than strengthening *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), this approach exacerbates divisions in both religious interpretations and daily practices. This divisiveness is particularly concerning in pluralistic societies, where religious harmony is paramount.

Abuya Mama Ghufron's preaching exemplifies how the misuse of digital media can accelerate the dissemination of deviant teachings and ignite societal controversies. This underscores the necessity for religious authorities to monitor such content and for the Muslim community to enhance its religious literacy, thereby enabling critical engagement with religious messages, particularly those disseminated online. A wise and context-sensitive preaching approach is essential to safeguard the purity of Islamic teachings and prevent the spread of doctrinal misunderstandings in the digital era.

Through a thematic interpretation approach, which examines the theme comprehensively, it can be seen that Surah At-Tahrim verse 9 provides justification for a tough stance in a specific context, namely facing real threats to the faith and teachings of Islam (Prianto, 2020). However, the language structure and *asbāb al-nuzūl* of this verse also underline that a firm stance must be based on clear revelation and remain within the framework of preserving the purity of Islamic teachings. Abuya Mama Ghufron's lecture, which is considered controversial and deviant, does not have the same strong theological foundation; therefore, his approach differs from the instructions given to the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

An analysis of Abuya Mama Ghufron's lecture shows that the approach used to convey religious messages is not in line with Ibn Kathir's interpretation (A. Farida et al., 2021). The firm stance presented in his lecture is seen as an excessive and controversial claim, which can cause confusion and resistance among the community. In Ibn Kathir's interpretation, a firm stance should be accompanied by justice and remain within the limits determined by Islamic law, not simply to stand out or to assert claims that cannot be substantiated according to Islamic teachings.

The tough preaching in Ibn Kathir's interpretation is intended to protect Islamic teachings from those who try to damage them. In contrast, Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermon caused a strong reaction because it was able to lead people to a wrong understanding. The firm attitude shown by Abuya Mama Ghufron was seen more as a form of authoritarianism in conveying religious teachings without considering the essence of gentleness and wisdom, which should be an integral part of Islamic preaching.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir also emphasizes that the Prophet Muhammad SAW, despite being ordered to be strict with hypocrites and infidels, still showed compassion and understanding in many aspects of his preaching. He was strict only when dealing with those who openly opposed and threatened the teachings of Islam. In this regard, Abuya Mama Ghufron's approach does not reflect the balance between the strictness and gentleness taught by the Prophet.

In the context of today's Muslim society, sermons that are considered deviant can cause great harm to the image of Islam and disrupt the harmony of the community. When Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermon is considered harsh because of its deviant content, this shows that delivering da'wah that is not based on correct understanding can cause confusion and conflict. Deviant sermons can also create polarisation among Muslims, between those who support a firm approach without criticism and those who adhere to gentle and wise da'wah.

The deconstruction of Ibn Kathir's interpretation teaches that a firm stance in preaching must always be within the framework of upholding the truth and purity of Islamic teachings, not to introduce unclear and controversial concepts. Ibn Kathir's stance is not an attitude that judges or forces others to accept certain views but rather a firm stance in upholding the principles of truth that have been taught by Islam.

The approach used by Abuya Mama Ghufron shows the importance of having a deep understanding of Islamic principles before conveying da'wah to the community (Suganda et al., 2024). An attitude that seems harsh because of teachings considered heretical can cause confusion and even resistance to the message of religion itself. This is contrary to the purpose of da'wah, which should bring enlightenment and a better understanding of Islamic teaching.

In this context, the comparison with Ibn Kathir's interpretation increasingly clearly shows that a harsh approach to preaching must be based on correct understanding and the intention to bring goodness to people. When preaching is carried out with deviant content, even if delivered firmly, it can cause misunderstanding and tarnish the essence of the preaching itself. Therefore, a harsh attitude toward preaching must always be accompanied by wisdom and deep knowledge of Islamic teachings.

Discussion

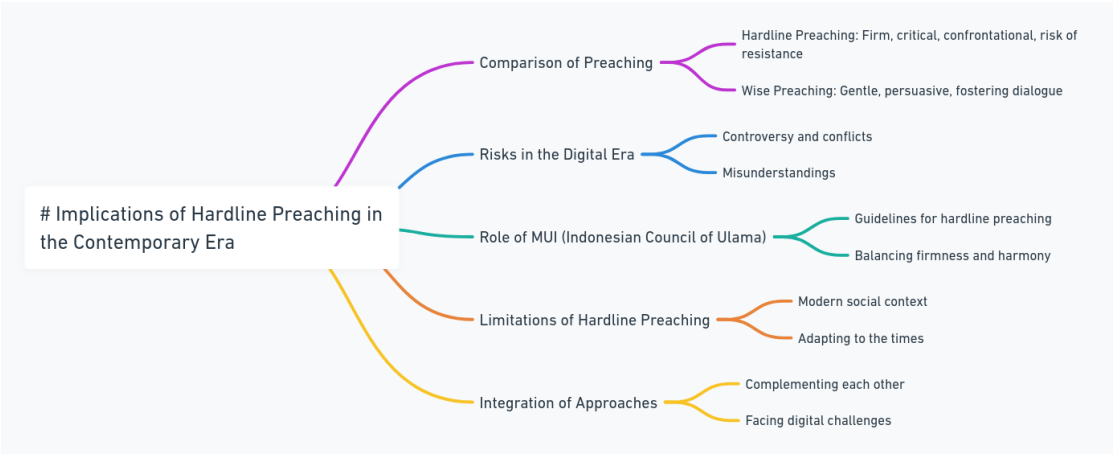
Implications of Hard Preaching in the Contemporary Era

Hard preaching and wise preaching differ fundamentally in their approaches to conveying religious messages. Hard preaching is often characterised by firm, critical, and at times confrontational language, aimed at affirming the truth and warning people about the dangers of deviation. In contrast, wise preaching employs a softer, more persuasive, and thoughtful approach, with the intention of touching the heart and raising awareness without provoking resistance. In the digital and social media era, the challenges of implementing hard preaching have become increasingly complex, as messages can be rapidly disseminated and interpreted in multiple ways by a broad audience.

One of the primary risks of harsh preaching in the digital age is its potential to spread content that provokes controversy or societal rejection. Social media enables harsh sermons to circulate quickly, often in fragmented forms that are divorced from their original context. This can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. As a result, preaching that is intended to offer enlightenment may instead become a source of conflict and division, both within the Muslim community and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Figure 1

Implications of Hard Preaching in the Contemporary Era



On the other hand, wise preaching has the advantage of building deeper dialogue and understanding, especially in an era in which society is increasingly critical and open to various types of information. An approach full of wisdom and empathy in conveying Islamic teachings is more effective for building

bridges of communication with different groups. However, wise preaching also faces challenges in dealing with issues that require firmness, especially in responding to deviations or threats to Islamic teaching.

The role of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and other religious authorities is important in directing how preaching should be delivered, especially when facing the phenomenon of harsh preaching that often causes controversy (Ali & Isnaini, 2024; Duduit, 2024; A. T. Setiawan et al., 2022). The MUI is responsible for ensuring that the preaching delivered by the preachers remains in accordance with Islamic teachings and does not cause division in society. The MUI's attitude toward the phenomenon of harsh sermons is often a reference for the community to determine their attitude toward religious issues.

When harsh sermons receive negative attention from the public, the MUI often issues official statements that emphasize the importance of preaching that prioritizes wisdom and prudence. This shows that the MUI plays a role in balancing the need for firmness in conveying the truth and the importance of maintaining peace and harmony in society. Thus, the MUI seeks to direct preachers to not only convey the truth firmly but also to consider the social impact of their preaching.

In some cases, MUI's stance on harsh preaching can be considered less firm, especially when responding to preachers who have a great influence on social media. This shows the complexity of the role of religious authorities in dealing with the dynamics of preaching in the digital era. The MUI needs to continue to strengthen its position as an authority that provides clear guidance on how harsh and wise preaching can go hand in hand to maintain harmony among people.

The limitations of harsh preaching in the current context must be understood within the framework of social changes and development. The interpretation of harsh preaching, as explained in Ibn Kathir's Tafsir on Surah At-Tahrim verse 9, may have been relevant during the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, when Muslims faced real threats from external and internal enemies (Arifin, 2021, 2024). However, in a pluralistic and complex modern society, a harsh approach can cause more harm than good if it is not accompanied by wisdom and a deep understanding of the social situation.

In an interview conducted in June 2025, Professor Abdullah, a professor of Qur'anic Exegesis and Islamic Communication at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, stated the following:

> *Every verse has its context of revelation and a specific purpose that cannot be applied carelessly in modern preaching. Especially in the digital era, where public perception forms rapidly and is easily misinterpreted, preachers must exercise extra caution in delivering their messages. Firmness is permissible even necessary when addressing deviation, but it must remain within the boundaries of justice, empathy, and wisdom. Regarding Abuya Mama Ghufron's video, I find his delivery style excessive and filled with metaphysical claims lacking a strong basis in tafsir. This poses a risk of misleading the ummah rather than enlightening them.* (Professor Abdullah, personal communication, June 2025).

Prof. Abdullah's statement reflects a critical stance toward the phenomenon of harsh preaching in the digital era, particularly as exemplified by Abuya Mama Ghufron. In his view, preaching is not merely about conveying the truth, but also about tailoring the message to the social context and the audience's capacity to comprehend it. He emphasizes the importance of caution, noting that digital media can rapidly amplify misinterpretations. This analysis highlights that firmness in *da'wah* does not justify a provocative or ungrounded communication style. On the contrary, if preaching is not based on valid *tafsir* and is not delivered with empathy, it risks causing misunderstandings and even doctrinal deviation among the public.

The interpretation of hard preaching must evolve in accordance with the times to remain relevant and effective in conveying the message of Islam (A. T. Setiawan et al., 2022). In an era where society is more connected and has wide access to various sources of information, a confrontational approach can lead to resistance and rejection of the Islamic message itself. Therefore, hard preaching must be adapted to the current context, with more emphasis on the aspects of dialogue, tolerance, and understanding of differences of opinion.

This does not mean that harsh preaching should be eliminated, but rather how to place it in the correct situation. For example, harsh preaching can be effective in providing warnings against practices that clearly violate Islamic principles, but must still be done with fair language and not incite hatred. This approach is more acceptable to society and does not cause division.

In the digital era, hard preaching must also focus on how the message is understood and received by a very diverse audience. This requires good communication skills, where the preacher can adjust the delivery of the message in a way that remains firm but does not cause negative reactions. In this case, the use of social media can be an effective tool if used wisely but can backfire if not managed carefully.

The MUI and other religious authorities can play an active role in providing guidance on how to deliver preaching in a wise yet firm manner (Amin et al., 2024; Simarmata & Misrah, 2024). The MUI needs to provide clear guidelines on the limits of harsh preaching so that there is no loophole for preachers to convey messages that have the potential to deviate or cause conflict. Thus, the MUI can help ensure that preaching in the digital era continues in accordance with Islamic teachings and does not become a source of division in society.

In the current context, the limitations of hard preaching must also take into account universal values such as respect for human rights, tolerance, and peace. This is essential for ensuring that Islamic preaching is understood and accepted as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, a message that brings blessings and goodness to all of humanity. Therefore, the approach of hard preaching must be balanced with wisdom that reflects the essence of inclusive and peaceful Islamic teachings.

Hard preaching and wise preaching are not opposing approaches, but rather complementary ones that can serve different purposes when applied appropriately (Sazali et al., 2024). Hard preaching may be necessary to uphold the principles of truth in specific situations, whereas wise preaching is often more effective in fostering dialogue and mutual understanding. Both approaches must be applied with careful consideration of the context, the audience, and the primary objectives of the preaching itself.

The challenge of preaching in the digital era is how to integrate these two approaches harmoniously so that the message of Islam can be delivered in a firm but wise, relevant, and accepted manner by the wider community. A firm attitude in conveying the truth must always be accompanied by the intention to bring goodness and enlightenment, and not to cause conflict or division.

Conclusion

The *tafsir,* deconstructive analysis, and contextual interpretation of Abuya Mama Ghufron's sermons demonstrate that harsh preaching occupies a very specific and limited space within Islamic teachings. The exegesis of Surah At-Tahrim verse 9 underscores the importance of firmness in confronting genuine threats to the faith and to the well-being of the Muslim community, particularly when dealing with disbelievers and hypocrites who pose existential dangers. However, such firmness must be grounded in the objective of safeguarding the purity of Islamic teachings, not in promoting controversial or unfounded rhetoric. The case of Abuya Mama Ghufron illustrates that harshness in preaching, when lacking a strong theological foundation, can generate public resistance and controversy.

This analysis shows that the use of harsh da'wah in contemporary religious contexts must be approached with caution. Modern audiences, especially in pluralistic and digitally connected societies, are often more sensitive to confrontational methods and are more receptive to da'wah that is wise, inclusive, and dialogical. Harshness should not be a default mode of preaching but rather a context-specific response to serious deviations. As such, Islamic preaching must continue to uphold the values of wisdom, prudence, and compassion to ensure that its message resonates meaningfully with an increasingly diverse audience.

As a recommendation, preachers and religious institutions should strive for a balanced approach that integrates both firm and gentle methods. While firmness remains necessary in addressing clear deviations from Islamic principles, it must be delivered in a manner that respects the audience’s dignity and understanding. Institutions such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) have a vital role to play

in setting guidelines and offering direction on appropriate preaching practices, particularly in the digital era, where messages can spread rapidly and shape public perceptions of Islam.

In conclusion, effective da'wah in the modern age demands a thoughtful balance between assertiveness and compassion, always rooted in the core truths of Islamic teaching. Preachers must convey their messages with relevance, wisdom, and empathy so that da'wah becomes a force for unity and spiritual growth rather than division. In this way, Islam's message can continue to be embraced as one that offers mercy, guidance, and goodness to all of humanity.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Doctoral Program in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, UIN Sumatra Utara, and the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Ethics Statement

As this study involved the content analysis of publicly available YouTube sermons and did not include direct interaction with human participants or the collection of personal data, ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, all data were handled with academic integrity, and no personal or sensitive information was disclosed.

The study utilised data collected from a social media platform (YouTube). In accordance with publication ethics, all analysed content was publicly accessible. No identifiable participant data were used, and excerpts from the videos were anonymised where necessary. Additionally, the data redistribution and usage policies of the platform were respected in compliance with YouTube's terms of service.

Data Access Statement

Research data supporting this publication are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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