

## Reinterpreting Hadiths Prohibiting Depiction of Living Beings through Gadamerian Hermeneutics in the Avatar Da'wah Trend

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### Abstract

Hadiths prohibiting the drawing of living beings have long served as a foundational legal reference in Islamic visual arts, sparking ongoing debates about their applicability in contemporary contexts. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing *takhrij al-hadith* analysis to evaluate the authenticity of these hadiths from both *sanad* (chain of transmission) and *matn* (content) perspectives. Drawing from primary sources such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and *Sunan Abu Dawud*, the research examines the historical, social, and theological underpinnings of these traditions. Findings reveal that the most relevant hadiths are classified as *sahih* (authentic), underscoring a strong textual basis for the prohibition. However, interpretations vary significantly among scholars. Classical figures like Imam Nawawi and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani view the ban as contextual, primarily aimed at preventing idolatry (*shirk*) and imitation of divine creation (*tasyabhu*), rather than an absolute restriction on all artistic expressions. Contemporary scholars, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, advocate for the permissibility of non-worshipful, functional uses, including education and aesthetics, provided they align with Islamic ethics and *maqashid al-shari'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law). The study concludes that understanding these hadiths requires contextualization within pre-Islamic Jahiliyy practices and modern societal shifts, where art is often valued for its aesthetic rather than idolatrous potential. This nuanced perspective promotes a balanced integration of visual arts in Islam, emphasizing *tauhid* (monotheism) and moral integrity over rigid prohibitions.

### Keywords:

Digitization, Nahdlatul Wathan Hizb, Living Qur'an, Nahdlatul Wathan, religious adaptation, digital

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## Introduction

The development of digital technology has shaped a new landscape in Islamic da'wah practices. Social media and virtual spaces encourage the use of visual representations as a means of religious communication, including the use of avatar images as a form of identity for preachers. Avatar-based da'wah patterns are considered effective in reaching a broad and cross-cultural audience. However, they also raise normative debates stemming from the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) regarding the prohibition of drawing living beings. These hadiths are often understood literally and ahistorically, thus leading to attitudes of rejection towards all forms of visualization, including non-material and communicative digital images.

Historically, the hadith prohibiting drawing emerged in the context of early Arab Islamic society, which was still strongly influenced by practices of venerating visual symbols and idol worship. This prohibition cannot be separated from the protective purpose towards tawhid and the prevention of resemblance to God's authority in creation (*mudāhāh bi khalq Allāh*). Therefore, the main problem targeted by this hadith is not merely the medium of the image, but the ideological and theological potentials that accompany it. However, the change in visual media from statues and paintings to non-physical digital images presents new challenges for the normative interpretation of this hadith.<sup>1</sup>

In the Islamic scholarly tradition, classical and contemporary scholars have proposed diverse legal classifications regarding images and paintings, distinguishing between three-dimensional and two-dimensional images, between those that are venerated and those that are profane or functional, and between those containing potential for shirk and those that do not. Nevertheless, most of these studies still operate within the framework of normative fiqh and have not fully responded to the transformation of digital visual culture. On the other hand, studies on digital da'wah tend to emphasize aspects of communication strategies and media effectiveness,<sup>2</sup> but lack dialogue with hadith as the primary normative source. This condition

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<sup>1</sup> Nasser Rabbat, "The Innocence of the Image: Representations of the Prophet in the Islamic Tradition," *Artforum* 53, no. 8 (2015), <https://www.artforum.com/features/the-innocence-of-the-image-representations-of-the-prophet-in-the-islamic-tradition-223421>.

<sup>2</sup> Zulfirman Manik et al., "Mediatization of Da'wah Hadith in the Digital Age: An Analysis of @risyad\_bay's TikTok Account," *Sufiya: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2025): 87–102, <https://journal.sufiya.org/index.php/sjis/article/view/128>; Soleh Hasan Wahid, "Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 10 (2024): 101085, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssho.2024.101085>.

indicates a research gap between hadith studies and contemporary visual da'wah practices.<sup>3</sup>

To bridge this gap, Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics approach offers a relevant interpretive framework. The concept of *wirkungsgeschichtliches bewusstsein* (historically effected consciousness) asserts that the history of its interpretation always influences understanding of a text, while *horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) enables dialogue between the historical context of the text and the current reader's reality. In this framework, hadith is not understood as a static text, but as a normative discourse whose meaning continuously interacts with social and cultural changes.<sup>4</sup>

This Gadamerian approach aligns with the idea of hadith contextualization developed by Abdul Muiz Amir et al.,<sup>5</sup> Abdul Mufid,<sup>6</sup> and Amin Abdullah,<sup>7</sup> which emphasizes the importance of reading religious texts historically, critically, and dialogically without negating their normative authority. Through this approach, the use of avatar images in digital da'wah can be understood as a symbolic and functional visual representation, not as a sacred object or a form of rivalry with God's creation. Thus, the main issue does not lie in the existence of the image itself, but in the meaning, intention, and ideological impact that accompany it.

Based on this framework, this study analyzes the hadith prohibiting the depiction of living beings through Gadamer's hermeneutic approach and contextualizes it within avatar-based digital da'wah practices. This study is essential for formulating a more proportional and contextual understanding of hadith, while offering an integrative model between the authority of religious texts and the dynamics of digital visual culture. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of contemporary hadith study methodology as well as strengthening adaptive, critical, and tawhid-rooted Islamic da'wah discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> Qudratullah Qudratullah and Syahrianti Syam, "Transformation of Da'wah through Digital Space," *Advances in Digital Transformation - Rise of Ultra-Smart Fully Automated Cyberspace*, *InTechOpen* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1004208>.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2025/entries/gadamer>.

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Muiz Amir, Sahiron Syamsuddin, and Siswanto Masruri, "Dialectic Relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith: The Interpretation of the Term 'As-Sā'ah' Using Critical Hermeneutic Analysis," *Jurnal Adabiyah* 21, no. 1 (2021): 57–81, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jad.v21i1a4>.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Mufid, "The Revolution of the Qur'anic Interpretation: Criticism of Jamal al-Banna's Methodology in 1920–2013," *Religia* 23, no. 1 (2020): 117–149, <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v23i1.1958>.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Amin Abdullah, "New Horizons of Islamic Studies through Socio-Cultural Hermeneutics," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 41, no. 1 (2003): 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2003.411.1-24>.

## Methods

This research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach. The primary data consists of the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) related to the prohibition of drawing living beings, particularly the authentic hadiths contained in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. Secondary data includes classical and contemporary hadith commentary books, works of fiqh scholars, as well as modern academic literature discussing Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, hadith contextualization, and visual-based digital da'wah. Additionally, this research draws on reputable national and international journal articles to strengthen the theoretical and analytical foundation of this study.

The analytical approach employed is Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, which emphasizes two main concepts: *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (historically effected consciousness) and *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons). The hadith prohibiting drawing is analyzed not only as a normative text, but also as a historical product whose meaning is shaped through the interaction between the historical context of early Islam and the horizon of understanding of contemporary readers. In this framework, the knowledge of hadith is carried out through critical dialogue between the text's horizon, its interpretive tradition, and contemporary socio-cultural realities, particularly digital visual culture.<sup>8</sup>

The data analysis procedure is conducted in three stages. First, textual-historical analysis of the hadith prohibiting drawing by tracing the context of emergence (*asbab al-wurud*), the wording of the hadith, as well as explanations from classical commentators such as al-Nawawi and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani. Second, a contextual analysis examines the transformation of the prohibition's meaning in the Islamic scholarly tradition and its relevance to changes in visual media, from statues and paintings to digital images and avatars. Third, hermeneutic-dialogical analysis, by applying the concept of the fusion of horizons, brings together the normative message of the hadith with contemporary digital da'wah practices, thereby obtaining a substantive and contextual understanding.

To maintain academic validity, this research applies source triangulation by comparing the views of classical scholars, contemporary Islamic thinkers, and modern hermeneutic theories. The analysis is conducted reflectively and critically while still considering the authority of the hadith text and the basic principles of Islamic theology. Through this method, the research is expected to produce an interpretation of the hadith prohibiting drawing that is not trapped in textual

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<sup>8</sup> Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer."

reductionism or contextual relativism. Still, it offers a balanced and applicable interpretive model in the context of digital da'wah, utilizing avatar images.

## The Prohibition of Drawing Living Creatures in Hadith: Analysis of 'Illat and its Implications

Drawing living creatures is a prohibited practice in Islam. This behavior is considered to have negative impacts, as it leads a Muslim back to the Jahiliya era, glorifying and potentially leading to shirk. This is in accordance with the words of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH):

حدثنا إبراهيم بن المنذر حدثنا أنس بن عياض عن عبيد الله عن نافع أن عبد الله بن عمر رضي الله عنهما أخبره أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال إن الذين يصنعون هذه الصور يعذبون يوم القيمة يقال لهم أحيوا ما خلقتم

It was narrated to us by Ibrāhīm bin al-Mundzir, narrated to us by Anas bin 'Iyād, from 'Ubaydullāh, from Nāfi', that 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) informed him that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: Indeed, those who make these images will be punished on the Day of Judgment. It will be said to them: 'Bring to life what you have created.'<sup>9</sup>

The hadith regarding the prohibition of making images of animate beings, narrated from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), is recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari and has a robust chain of narration. Its chain of transmission goes through the path of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mundzir, Anas ibn 'Iyād, 'Ubaydullāh ibn 'Umar, from Nāfi', from Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), which scholars of hadith regard as a trustworthy and continuous chain. The path of Nāfi' from Ibn 'Umar is even known as one of the best chains (*al-silsilah al-dhahabiyyah*), so in terms of the chain, this hadith is authentic without disagreement and can be used as evidence in establishing Sharia rulings.<sup>10</sup>

From the aspect of the *matn*, the words of the Prophet, "Indeed, those who make these images will be punished on the Day of Judgment," indicate a severe threat (*wa'īd*) against the act of making images. The statement clarifies this threat "it will be said to them: bring to life what you have created," which is in the nature of *taubīkh* (reproach) and *ta'jīz* (affirmation of incapacity). This command is not intended as a literal demand, but as a theological sarcasm that affirms that humans

<sup>9</sup> Narrated from Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mundhir to Anas ibn 'Iyād to 'Ubaydullāh to Nāfi' to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar. Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī al-Ju'fī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1422 H), 5: 2220, Kitāb al-Libās, Bāb 'Adzāb al-Muṣawwirīn Yawm al-Qiyāmah, no. Hadith 5607.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

cannot create life as Allah does. Thus, the *matn* of this hadith contains a strong doctrinal message about the exclusivity of the attribute of creation as Allah's right.<sup>11</sup>

The *'illat* (legal reason) that can be drawn from this hadith is the element of rivalry with Allah's creation (*tasyabhu bi khalqillah*) as well as the potential for glorification of images that can lead to deviation from tawhid. Therefore, the majority of scholars understand that this prohibition encompasses the creation of images of living creatures, whether in three-dimensional form (such as statues) or two-dimensional form (such as paintings), and is not limited to specific media or techniques. Conversely, images of inanimate objects and plants are exempt because they do not involve the creation of living beings. This understanding is reinforced by other hadiths on the same theme, including the narration from Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) about a pillow with images and the threat that angels will not enter a house containing images.<sup>12</sup>

From a fiqh perspective, this hadith serves as the primary basis for the prohibition of creating images of living creatures, especially when placed in honored locations or with the potential to cause idolatry. The severity of the punishment threat in this hadith suggests that the act is considered a major sin by some scholars. However, in contemporary contexts, differences of opinion arise regarding photography and modern visual media. Some scholars differentiate it from manual drawing because photography is understood as capturing real shadows, not a creation process. Nevertheless, other scholars still include it within the scope of the prohibition if it contains elements of glorification or opens pathways to shirk, in line with the principle of *sadd al-dharā'i'* (blocking the means to harm).<sup>13</sup>

Thus, this hadith not only functions as a normative basis for the prohibition of drawing living creatures, but also affirms the theological and preventive dimensions of Sharia in preserving the purity of tawhid. The punishment threat conveyed by the Prophet (PBUH) serves as a warning to ensure that artistic and visual expressions do not exceed limits, thereby avoiding attitudes of rivalry with Allah's creation and opening space for doctrinal deviations.

Another fact about the prohibition of drawing is also illustrated in the case once done by Aisha, who mentioned that she once covered a small space in her house

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, n.d.), 10 : 388–389.

<sup>12</sup> Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Libās wa al-Zīnah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), Hadith no. 2107; Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa’* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), Hadist no. 3547.

<sup>13</sup> Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Ḥalāl wa al-Ḥarām fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1994), 171–174; see also: ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz, *Majmū’ Fatāwā wa Maqālāt Mutanawwi’ah*, Vol. 4 (Riyadh: Dār al-Qāsim, 1996), 213–216.

with a curtain with images to welcome the return of the Messenger of Allah from a journey. When the Messenger of Allah saw the curtain, he immediately tore it, his face changed, then said, "O Aisha, the people who will receive the heaviest punishment from Allah on the Day of Judgment are those who rival Allah's creation." This hadith is narrated as *muttafaq 'alaih* by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

حدثنا يحيى بن يحيى قال قرأت على مالك عن نافع عن القاسم بن محمد عن عائشة أنها اشتترت نمرة فيها تصاوير فلما رأها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قام على الباب فلم يدخل فعرفت أو فعرفت في وجهه الكراهة فقالت يا رسول الله أتوب إلى الله وإلى رسوله فماذا أذنبت فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ما بال هذه النمرة اشتريتها لك تقدع عليها وتوسدها فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إن أصحاب هذه الصور يعذبون ويقال لهم أحيوا ما خلقت ثم قال إن البيت الذي فيه الصور لا تدخله الملائكة

It was narrated to us by Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā, he said: I read to Mālik, from Nāfi', from al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, from Aisha that she bought a *numruqah* (small pillow) in which there were images. When the Messenger of Allah saw it, he stood at the door and did not enter. So I knew—or it was clear—the displeasure on his face. Then I said: "O Messenger of Allah, I repent to Allah and to His Messenger. What is my fault?" The Messenger of Allah said, "What is with this pillow?" I answered: "I bought it for you, so that you may sit and lean on it." Then the Messenger of Allah said: "Indeed, the owners (makers) of these images will be punished, and it will be said to them: bring to life what you have created." Then he said again: "Indeed, a house in which there are images will not be entered by the angels."<sup>14</sup>

The hadith narrated by Ummul Mukminin Aisha about the pillow (*numruqah*) with images is narrated by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* through a robust and trustworthy chain of narration. Its chain of transmission—Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā from Mālik ibn Anas, from Nāfi', from al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, from Aisha—consists of trustworthy narrators and is known as a solid Madani path. Mālik ibn Anas, as the imam of Dar al-Hijrah, and al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, one of the seven fuqaha of Madinah, indicate that this hadith is not only authentic in terms of its chain but also carries crucial information in establishing fiqh rulings.<sup>15</sup>

From the aspect of the *matn*, this hadith contains several important indicators in understanding the prohibition of images of living beings. The attitude of the Prophet, who stopped at the door and was reluctant to enter Aisha's house,

<sup>14</sup> Narrated from Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā, from Mālik ibn Anas, from Nāfi', from al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, from 'Aisha. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Libās wa al-Zīnah, Bāb Taḥrīm Taṣwīr Ṣūrat al-Ḥayawān, hadith no. 2107; see also: Al-Naysābūrī, hadith no. 1665.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith no. 1665.

exemplifies the form of *inkar bi al-fil*, namely denial of evil through real action. The change in the Prophet's facial expression became a sign of a Sharia violation that cannot be tolerated, even if done without bad intentions. This indicates that good intentions are not sufficient to permit prohibited means, so the rule *al-ghayah la tubarrir al-wasilah* (the end does not justify the means) is relevant to apply in the context of this hadith.<sup>16</sup>

The threat conveyed by the Prophet—"Indeed, the owners of these images will be punished, and it will be said to them: bring to life what you have created"—contains the meaning of *taubikh* (reproach) and *ta'jiz* (affirmation of incapacity). The command is impossible to carry out and functions as a theological affirmation that the creation of living creatures is the exclusive right of Allah. Thus, the main *illat* of the prohibition of drawing is the element of *tasyabbuh bi khalqillah* (resembling or rivaling Allah's creation), which has the potential to blur the concept of tawhid *rububiyyah*.<sup>17</sup>

This hadith also highlights spiritual consequences, as the Prophet's words indicate that angels do not enter a house where there are images. Scholars explain that what is meant is the angels of mercy, not the angels who record deeds (*hafazah*). This consequence shows that the presence of images of living creatures not only has legal impacts, but also impacts the loss of blessings and spiritual tranquility in Muslim households.<sup>18</sup>

From the perspective of *fiqh al-hadith*, this hadith affirms that the prohibition is not limited to three-dimensional statues, but also includes two-dimensional images used as decorations or placed in honored spaces. Therefore, the majority of scholars do not differentiate between media and techniques for creating images, but rather emphasize the object and function of the image. In contemporary contexts, debates regarding photography and modern visual media remain relevant. Some scholars view photography as capturing shadows, rather than creating them. In contrast, others still categorize it under the prohibition if it causes glorification or opens pathways to doctrinal deviation, in line with the principle of *sadd al-dharā'i*.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, this hadith reflects the preventive approach of Sharia in preserving the purity of tawhid and closing all gaps that can lead to shirk. The prohibition of images

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<sup>16</sup> Abū Ishaq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Shari‘ah*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d.), 302.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 10 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d.), 388–389.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 14 (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2010), 81–88.

<sup>19</sup> Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Ḥalāl wa al-Ḥarām fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1994), 171–174; see also ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin Bāz, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā wa Maqālāt Mutanawwi‘ah*, Vol. 4 (Riyadh: Dār al-Qāsim, 1996), 213–216.

of living creatures is not merely intended to limit aesthetic expression, but to affirm the theological boundaries between human creativity and Allah's absolute power as al-Khaliq. Within this framework, the firm attitude of the Prophet serves as practical tawhid education, instilling doctrinal sensitivity in the daily lives of Muslims.

## **Gadamer's Hermeneutic Analysis of the Hadith Prohibiting Depiction of Living Beings**

The interpretation of the hadith prohibiting the depiction of living beings requires an interpretive approach that can bridge the authority of the text with the dynamics of ever-changing socio-cultural contexts.<sup>20</sup> Within the framework of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, the understanding of hadith is not viewed as a reproduction of literal meaning from the past, but rather as a dialogical process between the historical horizon of the text and the horizon of contemporary readers, who are influenced by tradition, language, and specific social contexts.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the hadith about the prohibition of drawing cannot be understood ahistorically and normatively alone, but must be placed in historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches bewusstsein*) that recognizes the influence of the early Islamic context on the formulation of the prohibition.

Within the historical context of early Arab Islamic society, images and statues served as sacred media, often associated with idolatrous practices. The Prophet's prohibition against making images—as reflected in the hadith of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her)—functions as theological protection for the purity of tawhid, not as a rejection of visuality as a communication medium. In other words, the normative intention of the hadith is directed at preventing theological mimesis (resemblance to Allah's creation) that has the potential to give birth to the veneration of visual symbols.<sup>22</sup> This perspective aligns with the historical-contextual approach in hadith studies that emphasizes the importance of understanding the socio-religious background of the hadith's emergence as part of its normative meaning.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> M. Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 300–305.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Juz 7 (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1422 H), 222; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Juz 3 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), 1665.

<sup>23</sup> Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2009), 89–94.

Gadamer's hermeneutics affirms that prejudice (*vorurteil*) is not a distortion of understanding, but an inevitable initial condition in every interpretive process.<sup>24</sup> In the tradition of fiqh and classical hadith commentary, normative prejudice often positions the prohibition of drawing as a universal provision without differentiation of function and context.<sup>25</sup> However, critical dialogue with the tradition itself reveals the diversity of scholars' views, which distinguish between images that are sacral-theological and those that are profane, functional, or educational. This approach aligns with Syamsuddin's idea about the importance of reading hadith that is sensitive to historical context and the social function of the text, without ignoring its normative authority.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of fusion of horizons (*horizontverschmelzung*) becomes key in contextualizing the hadith prohibiting drawing into contemporary digital da'wah realities.<sup>27</sup> In the context of digital visual culture, avatar images do not function as sacred objects or theological symbols, but as semiotic representations that are communicative and instrumental. Avatars are used to convey da'wah messages, build digital identities, and bridge communication with audiences without ontological claims as the "creation" of living beings. Therefore, when the hadith's horizon meets the digital culture horizon, the prohibition of drawing undergoes an operational meaning shift: from prohibition against visual media to prohibition against its theological purpose and implications.<sup>28</sup>

This approach aligns with the integrative-interconnective paradigm developed by Amin Abdullah, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue between religious texts, social contexts, and developments in knowledge in formulating relevant and sustainable Islamic understandings.<sup>29</sup> In this framework, the use of avatars in da'wah can be understood as a form of cultural ijtihad oriented towards *maslahah*, provided it does not contain elements of glorification, personal cult, or

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<sup>24</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 277–280

<sup>25</sup> Izatul Muhidah Maulidiyah and Aida Mushbirotus Zahro. "Telaah Perbandingan Metode Tafsir Maqasidi dan Ma'na Cum Maghza dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Moderasi: the Journal of Ushuludin and Islamic Thought, and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 2 (2021): 156. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jm.2021.12.03>.

<sup>26</sup> Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Ma'na-Cum-Maghza Approach to the al-Qur'an: Interpretation of Q. 5: 51," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Qur'an and Hadith Studies (ICQHS)* 137 (2017): 132. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icqhs-17.2018.21>.

<sup>27</sup> Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Pendekatan Ma'na Cum Maghza dalam Penafsiran al-Qur'an," public lecture, December 2, 2022, live streaming by Iatsenja Cirebon, YouTube, 1:50:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLFNjHwOgcQ&t=4691s>.

<sup>28</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 111–114.

<sup>29</sup> Abdullah, *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi*, 104–110.

potential doctrinal deviation. Abdul Mustaqim refers to such a model as normative contextualization, namely, efforts to maintain the core values of teachings while accommodating changes in media and culture.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 1. Analysis of the Hadith Prohibiting Depiction of Living Beings through Gadamerian Hermeneutics**

Analysis Aspects	Analytical Description
Text of Hadith	The hadiths prohibiting the drawing of living beings, particularly the narration from Aisha, affirm a severe threat against <i>al-musawwirūn</i> who "resemble Allah's creation," with emphasis on the theological and moral dimensions of the prohibition.
Historical Context	The prohibition emerged in early Arab Islamic society, which was still laden with traditions of idol worship. Images and statues functioned as sacred symbols with the potential to shift tawhid towards practices of visual veneration.
'Illat of the Prohibition	Scholars identify the main 'illat as <i>muḍāḥāh bi khalq Allāh</i> (resemblance to Allah's creation) and <i>sadd al-dhārī'ah</i> against shirk, not merely the existence of images as visual media.
Interpretive Tradition of Scholars	Classical and contemporary scholars distinguish between images that are sacral-theological and those that are functional or profane. Differences of opinion demonstrate the flexibility of normative meaning in Islamic tradition.
Gadamer's Hermeneutics	Through the concepts of <i>wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein</i> and <i>Horizontverschmelzung</i> , the hadith is understood as a text whose meaning arises from dialogue between the historical horizon of the text and the contemporary reader's horizon.
Prejudice (Vorurteil)	Normative understanding of the prohibition on drawing is often shaped by theological prejudices inherited from tradition. Gadamer's hermeneutics views prejudice as the starting point of understanding, not a barrier to interpretation.
Digital Da'wah Context	Avatar images in the context of digital da'wah serve as communicative and symbolic representations; they are not sacred objects or forms of claiming the creation of living beings.
Fusion of Horizons	When the hadith's horizon meets the horizon of digital visual culture, the prohibition on drawing shifts from the medium to the purpose and theological implications of using such images.
Legal Implications	The use of avatars in da'wah can be hermeneutically tolerated as long as it does not contain elements of glorification, personal cult, or doctrinal deviation.
Theoretical Contribution	This analysis affirms the importance of a contextual-hermeneutic approach in hadith studies, as developed by Sahiron Syamsuddin, Abdul Mustaqim, and Amin Abdullah.

Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutics enables a dialogical and productive reading of the hadith prohibiting drawing, without reducing the authority of the text or ignoring contemporary visual cultural realities. The use of avatar images in digital da'wah can be hermeneutically accepted as a functional and communicative repre-

<sup>30</sup> Abdul Mustaqim, *Ilmu Ma'ānī al-Ḥadīth: Paradigma Interkoneksi Berbasis Kontekstualisasi* (Yogya-karta: Idea Press, 2016), 57–63.

sentational medium, not as a practice that rivals God's creation (Table 1). This contextualization demonstrates that fidelity to hadith is not always achieved through a literal interpretation, but rather by maintaining its theological purpose in ever-changing historical contexts.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that the hadith prohibiting the drawing of living beings cannot be understood literally and ahistorically, but must be read in the socio-religious context of early Arab society, which was still vulnerable to the veneration of visual symbols. The prohibition functions as a protective mechanism for the purity of tawhid by preventing the practice of *tasyabuh bi khalqillah* and potential shirk. Hence, its substance is theological-preventive, not an absolute rejection of all forms of visual representation. Through Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics approach, the dialogue between the historical horizon of the hadith text and the horizon of digital visual culture enables a fusion of horizons that produces contextual and proportional interpretation.

Within this framework, the use of avatar images in digital da'wah can be understood as a representational medium that is functional and communicative, rather than theological, as long as it does not contain elements of glorification, doctrinal deviation, or violations of Islamic ethics. The novelty of this research lies in the application of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a conceptual model to bridge the normative authority of hadith with avatar-based visual da'wah practices, which have hitherto been debated dichotomously as either halal or haram. These findings contribute to the development of hadith contextualization methodology as well as expanding studies on Islamic da'wah in the contemporary digital visual culture landscape.

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All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

### ***Statement of Interest***

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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